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Economy grew 3.3%, above expectations

Global economy faces major uncertainties but
S'pore has cause to be confident of future: PM

Linette Lai
Political Correspondent

Singapore's economy grew by 3.3 per cent last year, close to 2017's growth, which was 3.5 per cent, and above expectations, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said in his New Year message.

He said the economy is expected to grow by between 1.5 per cent and 3.5 per cent this year, but warned that the global economy faces major uncertainties with growing trade conflicts, nervous financial markets and signs of slowing growth.

But with long-term policies in place and a strong team in charge, the Republic has reason to be confident about its future, he added.

In his traditional message released yesterday, PM Lee noted that significant headway was made in leadership succession last year.

The younger political office-holders are being exposed to different responsibilities and working together as a team. They have settled on Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat as their leader and supported Mr Heng's choice of Trade and Industry Minister Chan Chun

Sing as his deputy.

"This is a good outcome. It gives Singaporeans and foreigners alike confidence that Singapore will be in good hands over the long term, beyond the working lives of me and my senior colleagues," PM Lee said.

He and the older ministers will do their utmost to help the new team take over the reins and to succeed in their responsibility to lead Singapore and secure its future.

Underlining the vital part Singaporeans play in the transition, he asked Singaporeans to work with the younger leaders "to form the best team for Singapore".

The country's model of governance is "quite exceptional, and has served us well", he said, enabling Singapore to make the most of what it has and stand out in a highly competitive world.

"Singapore politics cannot afford to be riven and destabilised by the rivalries, contestations and factions so often seen elsewhere," he said. "Instead Singaporeans must stay united, and work together resolutely to strengthen and renew our social compact."

On the international front, he said Singapore had an eventful year hosting the historic summit between United States President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, as well as chairing Asean. Under its chairmanship themes of innovation and resilience, it launched practical initiatives to enhance regional stability and integration, he added.

But tensions between the US and China will cause problems for the

Leaping into the new year



Children at Our Tampines Hub having fun yesterday in a giant ball pit, one of several free fringe activities organised ahead of the new year. Other events included free movie screenings and a food bazaar. Over at Marina Bay, hundreds of thousands of merry-makers gathered to usher in 2019 with a spectacular seven-minute fireworks display set to cap the night's festivities. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

world and make it harder for countries to be friends with both. "If countries are forced to choose sides, the open and connected global order will be further divided, hurting one and all."

Closer to home, Singapore is also tending relations with its immediate neighbours.

On the domestic front, PM Lee said Singapore faces pressures common to many countries. Societies abroad are under stress because people are angry that wages are stagnating, their lives are not improving and political systems are malfunctioning.

"But we have coped better than most other countries, because we have worked closely together to improve the lives of all Singaporeans," he said, citing how the economy has grown, unemployment remains low and incomes have risen across the board.

"We have created good jobs, and prepared people for them through education and SkillsFuture. Crucially, the Government is focused on people's concerns, and working with citizens to create a better tomorrow for all."

He listed policy improvements in such areas as healthcare, educa-

• The Prime Minister wishes all Singaporeans a Happy New Year.

• The Straits Times wishes all readers a Happy New Year.

tion, housing and public transport. These are critical investments in Singapore's future, and to realise them requires steady and capable leaders who can rally Singaporeans.

"With long-term policies in place and a strong team in charge, we have reason to be confident about the future," he said.

"Despite the uncertain external environment and economic outlook, we are entering our Bicentennial Year with renewed vigour and purpose," he said.

"We are ready to tackle the challenges ahead and make further progress in building a secure, harmonious and prosperous nation."

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SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A4,
OPINION A16

PM on ties with S'pore's neighbours

Touching on relations with Singapore's immediate neighbours in his New Year message, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong noted that ties with Indonesia have been positive, with significant cooperation and investments flowing in both directions.

On Malaysia, which formed a new government following elections in May, he said Singapore hopes to maintain a constructive partnership with Malaysia, and looks forward to the new leaders on both sides developing good working relations with one another.

"Nevertheless, several issues have recently arisen between us, as they will from time to time between two close neighbours tightly bound by history, economics, culture and kinship," he said.

"When Malaysia wanted to defer the High-Speed Rail project, Singapore worked with them to accommodate their needs," he said.

"The new disputes on maritime boundaries, following provocative intrusions into our territorial waters, and on airspace, particularly the Instrument Landing System

rules for Seletar Airport, are more difficult to resolve. Malaysia also wants to revise the price of Johor water, an old issue recently revived, on which Singapore's stand is quite clear."

PM Lee said: "We will deal with all these matters calmly and constructively. Singapore and Malaysia must manage specific problems, however difficult, while preserving the overall relationship. The way to do so is through equality and mutual respect, upholding international commitments and the rule of law."

"Older Singaporeans will remember that this is how we dealt with previous rough patches in bilateral relations. Each time we would unite as one people, and stand our ground calmly but firmly. I am confident that this time too Singaporeans will work closely together to keep relations with Malaysia stable, and a new generation will learn how to collectively protect our vital interests while living in peace and friendship with our neighbours."

Linette Lai

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10 must-reads for today

1 200km bicentennial walk

Mr R. Subramaniam and Mr G. Suresh Kumar walked 200km, starting from and ending at East Coast Park, from Saturday night to yesterday night. In the first such long-distance walk to be organised in Singapore, the two men walked non-stop, taking breaks only for food and to go to the toilet, as part of the bicentennial celebrations.

HOME B1



Veteran walkers R. Subramaniam and G. Suresh Kumar (with cap) on the last 40km of their 200km bicentennial walk yesterday. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

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VIDEO

An IP dropout's story

Despite graduating with top honours from an Australian university, his past as an Integrated Programme dropout here still haunts Mr Edwin Chau.
<http://str.sg/edwinchau>



VIDEO

7 travel experiences for 2019

New year, new destinations. Have a look at these seven places to add to your 2019 bucket list.
<http://str.sg/o63X>

2 Economy grew 3.3% in 2018

In his traditional New Year message, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said that last year, Singapore's economy grew by 3.3 per cent, close to 2017's growth of 3.5 per cent, and above expectations. The economy is expected to grow by between 1.5 per cent and 3.5 per cent this year, but PM Lee warned that the global economy faces major uncertainties. [TOP OF THE NEWS A1](#)

3 SingHealth breach report

A report summing up and assessing all the evidence collected over 21 days of hearings from 37 witnesses on the events that led to healthcare cluster SingHealth's cyber attack in June has been submitted to Minister-in-charge of Cybersecurity S. Iswaran. [TOP OF THE NEWS A6](#)

4 Stranded man rescued

A fisherman who was out at sea when the deadly tsunami struck and crushed his boat has been rescued. Mr Ari Agus Arman Harianto had spent a week taking refuge on an island near the volcano that erupted and triggered the killer wave before his rescue by the navy on Sunday. [WORLD A8](#)

5 Rare tribal encounter

Indian anthropologist Madhumala Chattopadhyay was among a team of two boats that on Jan 4, 1991, drifted close to the island inhabited by the Sentinelese. Her encounter was the first of only two recorded friendly contacts with this poorly known tribe in India's Andaman and Nicobar islands. [WORLD A9](#)

6 Global threats in 2019

In his global threat forecast for the year, Professor Rohan Gunaratna says Muslim terror groups continue to dominate the threat landscape, but ultra-nationalist politics also creates new risks. [OPINION A15](#)

7 The many faces of Raffles

To many, Sir Stamford Raffles is held in esteem as the founder of modern Singapore. But a new exhibition opening next month at the Asian Civilisations Museum will seek to peel back the layers of who the Briton was, down to his callous side. [HOME B6](#)

8 Yen ends 2018 on high note

The Japanese yen was set to end 2018 as the biggest winner against the US dollar among major currencies, after benefiting as investors sought out safety amid the year's uncertainties. [BUSINESS C2](#)

9 Ridhwan changes tack

Top local boxer Muhamad Ridhwan has switched trainers and will work with coach Joven Jimenez for more than two months at the Survival Camp in Cavite, in the Philippines, in preparation for his March 29 rematch against Namibian Paulus Ambunda. [SPORT C8](#)

10 Spotlight on toy piano

Musician Margaret Leng Tan (below), hailed as the pioneer of toy piano performances, shows her artistry in Toy! Toy! Toy! at The Ngee Ann Kongsi Auditorium in the National Gallery Singapore on Jan 26, while young Singaporean musician Gu Wei performs in Play-Play: A Toy/Piano Concert at the Esplanade Recital Studio on Saturday. [LIFE D5](#)



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Long-term policies in place and strong team in charge: PM

He cites policy improvements in healthcare, education, housing and public transport

With long-term policies in place and a strong team in charge, Singaporeans have reason to be confident of their future, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

In a New Year message yesterday that touched on Singapore on the international stage, domestic issues and leadership transition, PM Lee noted that the country has made progress domestically.

He noted that in many countries, societies are under stress because people are angry that wages are stagnating, their lives are not improving and political systems are malfunctioning.

The protests in France were the most recent manifestation of this angst.

"Being a highly open society, Singapore is exposed to similar pressures," he said.

"But we have coped better than most other countries, because we have worked closely together to improve the lives of all Singaporeans," he said. "The economy has grown,

unemployment remains low, and incomes have risen across the board. We have created good jobs, and prepared people for them through education and SkillsFuture."

He added: "Crucially, the Government is focused on people's concerns, and working with citizens to create a better tomorrow for all."

He listed policy improvements in such areas as healthcare, education, housing and public transport.

For example, healthcare infrastructure is being ramped up with the building of more polyclinics and hospitals. The latest - Sengkang General and Community hospitals - started taking patients last August.

Upcoming improvements to the Community Health Assist Scheme, which subsidises medical care, as well as national disability insurance scheme CareShield Life, will further support those with chronic conditions and disabilities.

Singaporeans of the Merdeka Generation born in the 1950s can

CREATING A BETTER TOMORROW

The economy has grown, unemployment remains low, and incomes have risen across the board. We have created good jobs, and prepared people for them through education and SkillsFuture. Crucially, the Government is focused on people's concerns, and working with citizens to create a better tomorrow for all.



PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN LOONG

also look forward to receiving their healthcare benefits package soon, just like the Pioneer Generation before them.

In education, greater emphasis is put on holistic development rather than examinations and grades, and more resources are being invested in pre-schools. Pre-school subsidies have been raised to lighten the burden on parents.

On the housing front, housing and infrastructure are being rebuilt for the next 50 years.

The Housing Board is working on schemes such as the Home Improvement Programme (HIP), HIP II and Voluntary Early Redevelopment Scheme (Vers) to ensure flats remain quality homes with "a good store of value for retirement".

HIP and HIP II are schemes to upgrade Housing Board flats. Under Vers, owners of flats aged 70 years and older can vote for the Government to buy back their homes before their leases run out, if their precinct is selected for the scheme.

Progress has also been made in public transport. Buses and trains are now less crowded and more reliable, new trains for the Thomson-East Coast MRT Line have been delivered in time for the Stage 1 opening in Woodlands this year, and public consultations for the 2040 land transport masterplan are under way. Work on the Tuas MegaPort and Changi Airport Terminal 5 is continuing, and the Jewel at Changi will open this year.

These, PM Lee said, are critical investments in Singapore's future, and to realise them requires steady and capable leaders who can rally Singaporeans.

"With long-term policies in place and a strong team in charge, we have reason to be confident about the future," he said.

Linette Lai

President Halimah calls for unity amid uncertainties in 2019

Adrian Lim
Political Correspondent

As the new year beckons, President Halimah Yacob has a sobering message for Singaporeans.

"As we enter 2019, the uncertainties and volatility we have to deal with have intensified," she said yesterday.

"We have to navigate them carefully for our own survival. But we can only do so if we stay united, cohesive and strong," she added.

In her video posted on Facebook, President Halimah also thanked Singaporeans for their generosity in contributing to the President's Challenge and for their support of worthy causes.

The President's Challenge was expected to raise \$13 million in 2018, a record for the annual community outreach and fund-raising campaign, according to a news report last November.

Madam Halimah said Singaporeans, especially the young, continue to generously volunteer their time. She has been "deeply inspired and motivated" by these Singaporeans, whom she has met, she said.

She plans to reach out and engage more Singaporeans this year, she added.

Meanwhile, the President encouraged Singaporeans to join in the commemorative activities which have been planned for the Istana's 150 years. The Istana was opened in October 1869.

One of the anniversary highlights is that people will be able to enter the Istana grounds at night for the first time during an open house in October.

Other events include a travelling exhibition on the Istana's history and heritage that will be put on show in the heartland and libraries across Singapore.

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Sydney kicks off global New Year's parties

SYDNEY • Australia's largest city Sydney put on its biggest-ever fireworks display to welcome the New Year and kicked off a wave of celebrations for billions around the world. A record amount of pyrotechnics as well as new fireworks effects and colours lit up the harbour city's skyline for 12 minutes and dazzled the more than 1.5 million spectators that crowded foreshores and parks.

"I am sure we will delight in seeing our beautiful harbour lit up like never before," Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore said yesterday before the celebrations.

To mark the international year of indigenous languages in 2019, the harbour hosted a ceremony celebrating Aboriginal heritage that included animations projected onto the Sydney Harbour Bridge's pylons.

Around the world, the party atmosphere swept across major cities in Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas as the clock ticked past midnight.

A strong police presence has become a key element of the events to protect crowds that could be targeted in terror and vehicle attacks.

Here is how cities celebrated:

- **Singapore:** Bazaars and carnivals in downtown Singapore culminated in a seven-minute fireworks display in Marina Bay at the stroke of midnight.
- **Hong Kong:** Glittering fireworks were sent skywards from five barges floating in Victoria Harbour in a 10-minute display, watched by an estimated 300,000 people on the foreshore.
- **Tokyo:** Japanese flocked to temples to ring in the New Year, while US boxer Floyd Mayweather Jr took on local kickboxer Tenshin Nasukawa in a bout outside Tokyo.
- **Moscow:** Concerts and light shows were held across the city's parks, and more than 1,000 ice rinks were opened for merry-makers.
- **Paris:** A fireworks display and sound-and-light show under the theme "Fraternity" went ahead on the Champs-Elysees despite plans for further "yellow vest" anti-government protests at the famed avenue.
- **Berlin:** Music lovers partied at a concert at the Brandenburg Gate, but a popular German tradition of setting off fireworks to mark the occasion was banned in some other cities over safety concerns.



New Year's Eve fireworks lighting up the sky over the Harbour Bridge and Opera House during the traditional early family fireworks show held before the main midnight event in Sydney. Around the world, the party atmosphere swept across major cities in Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

- **London:** Britain's capital ushered in the New Year by celebrating its relationship with Europe amid turmoil over the Brexit referendum vote to leave the union, with the fireworks display at the London Eye featuring music from the continent's artists.
- **Edinburgh:** The Scottish capital's traditional Hogmanay celebrations also took on a pro-European theme ahead of this year, when Britain is due to exit the EU.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2019

As the world partied last night, many also looked forward to 2019 and wondered whether the turmoil witnessed during the previous year would spill over into the next.

The political wrangling in Westminster over Brexit was one of the key stories of last year, with a resolution yet to be reached ahead of the scheduled March 29 departure from the EU.

United States President Donald Trump dominated headlines last

year as he ramped up his trade war with China, quit the Iran nuclear deal, moved the American embassy to Jerusalem and met his North Korean counterpart Kim Jong Un in Singapore for a historic summit.

North Korea's commitment to denuclearisation will remain a major political and security issue into this year, as will Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's reassertion of control after Mr Trump's shock military withdrawal announcement.

The war in Yemen, which started in 2014 and has already killed about 10,000 people and left some 20 million at risk of starvation, could take a crucial turn after a ceasefire took effect in the middle of last month.

Numerous countries go to the polls this year, with key elections to be held in India, Afghanistan, Indonesia, South Africa, Argentina and Australia.

Major sporting events on the calendar include the Rugby World Cup in Japan, the cricket one-day international World Cup in England and the athletics World Championships in Qatar. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



Children welcoming the New Year during celebrations at their school in Ahmedabad, India, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

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COURTS

Lease Buyback Scheme extended to all HDB flats

Seniors living in five-room and larger flats can now sell part of remaining lease to HDB

Rachel Au-Yong
Housing Correspondent

Seniors living in five-room and larger flats will be able to sell part of their leases back to the Housing Board from today. This allows them to monetise their homes, while continuing to live there.

Previously, the Lease Buyback Scheme was available only to owners of four-room or smaller HDB flats.

All owners must reach the eligibility age, currently set at 65 years, before they can sell part of the lease back. They must have a gross monthly household income of \$12,000 or less, with at least one of the owners being a Singaporean, and have at least 20 years of lease to sell. At the same time, they must keep a minimum of 15 to 30 years of lease, depending on their age.

As of November last year, about 34,000 families would benefit from extending the scheme to five-roomers, bringing the total number of eligible households to about 130,000, the HDB said in a statement today.

Among them is part-time security guard Tang Lum Sui, 68, a widower who lives alone in his Jalan Bahagia five-room flat and had petitioned his MP several times to have the scheme – rolled out in 2009 – extended to home owners like him.

“I don’t want to move out of Toa Payoh because I have lived here all my life, and I like that my son’s family (living in Qatar) can stay with me whenever they come back to Singapore,” he said. Mr Tang, whose



Mr Tang Lum Sui, a part-time security guard, lives alone in his Jalan Bahagia five-room flat. The 68-year-old widower had petitioned his MP several times to have the scheme – rolled out in 2009 – extended to home owners like him.
ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

flat has 67 years left on the lease, added: “As long as the terms are favourable, I will go for it.”

The extension was first announced by National Development Minister Lawrence Wong last August as part of the short-term measures to help the elderly unlock the value of their HDB flats for retirement.

On top of the proceeds they would receive from selling part of their remaining lease to the HDB, households living in larger flats will get an additional \$5,000 bonus.

The HDB said those interested in the scheme can get personalised financial counselling so they can make informed choices. This includes going through the terms and conditions and a preliminary financial plan based on the estimated net

proceeds sellers would get.

After selling part of their leases, owners must top up their Central Provident Fund (CPF) Retirement Accounts to the higher Full Retirement Sum for their age cohort if they are the sole owners, or to the Basic Retirement Sum if there are two or more owners.

After that, households may keep the next \$100,000 in cash.

If there are proceeds leftover, owners have to top up their respective Retirement Accounts to the prevailing Full Retirement Sum before keeping the balance in cash.

At the counselling session, seniors will get an estimate of the monthly payouts from CPF Life which they can get if they sell their lease. HDB officers will also go through other monetisation op-

tions, such as renting out spare bedrooms to supplement seniors’ retirement income and downsizing to a smaller flat, for which they can qualify for a Silver Housing Bonus of up to \$20,000.

While the current take-up rate is relatively low – about 3,300 families have benefited to date – observers said the expansion will be especially appreciated by those who need it.

Nee Soon GRC MP Henry Kwek, who had urged the authorities to extend the scheme before, said: “The changes will help our seniors fund their retirement by tapping their housing equity, while retiring in the comfort of their own neighbourhood. I expect it to be well-received.”

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How it pans out for a couple aged 65

The Housing Board gave an example of how much a couple, who are both 65 years old, might get for their fully paid-up five-room flat.

With 65 years left on its lease, the flat is valued at \$520,000.

Assume that the couple – say, a Mr and Mrs Lim – join the Lease Buyback Scheme (LBS) and keep 30 years of the lease. They sell the remaining 35 years to the Housing Board for \$219,300.

As Mr and Mrs Lim are joint owners, they will receive an equal split of the sale proceeds, amounting to \$109,650 each.

They will each use their share of the proceeds to top up their Central Provident Fund (CPF) Retirement Accounts (RA) to the Basic Retirement Sum, which is \$88,000 for their cohort.

Mr Lim needs to top up \$68,000 as he started with \$20,000 in his RA, while Mrs Lim needs to top up \$83,000 as she started with \$5,000 in her RA.

Mr and Mrs Lim will receive the full cash bonus of \$5,000 as their total CPF Retirement Account top-up exceeds \$60,000.

After topping up, they have remaining proceeds of \$68,300. They can keep all of this in cash.

In total, Mr and Mrs Lim will receive \$73,300 in cash (including the LBS bonus of \$5,000) and will also receive monthly payouts of \$1,000 under CPF Life for the rest of their lives.

UNLOCKING VALUE OF HOMES

The changes will help our seniors fund their retirement by tapping their housing equity, while retiring in the comfort of their own neighbourhood. I expect it to be well-received.



NEE SOON GRC MP HENRY KWEK

Probe panel submits SingHealth cyber-attack report

Irene Tham
Senior Tech Correspondent

An exhaustive report that details the events leading up to the cyber attack on SingHealth’s patient database – the most serious data breach in Singapore’s history – has been submitted to Minister-in-charge of Cybersecurity S. Iswaran.

The report sums up and assesses the evidence collected over 22 days of mostly public hearings from 37 witnesses. It also makes recommendations on ways to secure huge databases in order to avoid a similar incident.

In a letter to Mr Iswaran yesterday, the four-member Committee of Inquiry (COI) that looked into the incident said: “This report contains sensitive information and is hence classified ‘Top Secret’.”

“The contents of the report are the unanimous view of all members of the committee,” it added.

The full report on the attack, which is believed to be state-sponsored and the act of sophisticated hackers, is not being published for reasons involving national security.

However, the COI will release a public version of the report, including all its recommendations, by Jan 10, said a Ministry of Communications and Information spokesman. It will be accessible at <http://mci.gov.sg/coireport>

Mr Iswaran, who is Minister for Communications and Information, and Minister for Health Gan Kim Yong, are expected to respond to the report in Parliament when the House sits this month.

In a letter thanking the COI for its report, Mr Iswaran said the panel has closely examined the responses to the incident and submitted a comprehensive set of recommendations to better manage and secure the IT systems of SingHealth, as well as those of other public healthcare clusters and the public sector, against similar attacks.

“The COI report is the result of an extensive fact-finding process and a rigorous inquiry over the past five months,” he said.

“The Government takes cyber security with utmost seriousness,” Mr Iswaran added. “We will learn from this incident and take measures to further strengthen our public sector IT systems and uphold the trust of Singaporeans.”

The high-level COI – chaired by retired senior judge Richard Magnus and with Mr Lee Fook Sun, executive chairman of security firm Ensign InfoSecurity, Mr T. K. Udairam, group chief operating officer of Sheares Healthcare Management, and Ms Cham Hui Fong, assistant secretary-general of the National Trades Union Congress, as other members – was appointed on July 24 to investigate Singapore’s worst data breach.

In June last year, hackers stole the personal data of 1.5 million SingHealth patients and the outpatient prescription information of 160,000 people, including Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

In his closing remarks on Nov 30, Mr Magnus said that organisations must assume that they are already under cyber attack by proactively identifying and mitigating breaches.

Solicitor-General Kwek Mean Luck from the Attorney-General’s Chambers, which led the evidence for the COI, spoke about the importance of organisational culture as cyber defence is everyone’s job, and not just that of the IT department.

Mr Kwek also outlined 16 recommendations, including improving staff’s cyber security awareness and performing enhanced checks.

Organisational culture became a key focus as the COI felt that people are at the heart of all processes and systems.

One issue that came under scrutiny was how certain staff at the Integrated Health Information Systems (IHIS), Singapore’s central IT agency for the healthcare sector, failed to act appropriately to report suspicious network activities.

The lack of situational awareness and training among staff contributed to the breach which took place from June 27 to July 4.

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Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina flashing the victory sign after casting her vote, accompanied by her daughter Saima Wazed Hossain (left) and sister Sheikh Rehana, at a polling station in Dhaka on Sunday. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Bangladeshi PM wins third term amid claims of election rigging

DHAKA • Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s alliance won Bangladesh’s election with a thumping majority, the country’s Election Commission said yesterday, giving her a third straight term following a vote that the opposition rejected as rigged.

The win consolidated Ms Hasina’s decade-long rule over Bangladesh, where she is credited with improving the economy and promoting development. But she has also been accused of rampant human rights abuses, a crackdown on the media and suppressing dissent. She denies such charges.

The alliance dominated by her Awami League, seen as close to regional power India, won 287 of the 298 seats for which results have been declared, the commission said. There are 300 constituencies in the country.

The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which boycotted the last polls in 2014, won just six seats.

Raising minimum wages for workers in Bangladesh’s massive garments industry, the world’s second-biggest after China, could be one of Ms Hasina’s first tasks after she takes office, party leaders have said.

Opposition leader Kamal Hossain said its alliance, the National Unity Front led by the BNP, had called on the Election Commission to order a fresh vote under a neutral administration as soon as possible, alleging that Sunday’s polls were flawed.

At least 17 people were killed as the vote took place, police said, after a violent campaign during which the opposition alleged that the government denied it a level playing field. “We have had bad elections in the past, but I must say that it is unprecedented how bad this particular election was,” Mr Hossain told Reuters on Sunday.

Candidates reported witnessing ballot stuffing and vote rigging by ruling party activists, who also barred opposition polling agents from

voting centres, Mr Hossain said.

However, Mr Sajeeb Wazed, Ms Hasina’s son and an Awami League member, told Reuters that no one was intimidated into voting for the party, and accused the BNP of pre-election violence.

“Overall, there were long lines at polling stations and voting was peaceful. Despite the alarmist characterisations of outsiders, democracy is stable and flourishing in Bangladesh,” Mr Wazed said.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s party congratulated Ms Hasina, calling her victory important for regional peace and Bangladesh’s progress.

The Election Commission said it was investigating allegations of vote rigging from across the Muslim-majority country of 165 million people.

Ms Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director for Human Rights Watch, said on Twitter: “With serious allegations of voter intimidation, restrictions on opposition

polling agents and several candidates seeking a repoll, there are concerns about the credibility of the Bangladesh elections.”

Hundreds of opposition workers were arrested in the months before the election on charges that the opposition said were fictitious.

Many said they were attacked by ruling party activists, crippling their ability to campaign.

Ms Hasina’s government has denied the accusations, and her party said many of its own workers were hurt in attacks by the opposition.

Seven ruling party workers and five BNP workers were killed and 20 wounded on Election Day, police said.

Reuters reporters across Bangladesh witnessed sparse attendance at polling booths, and some voters alleged ruling party workers had blocked them from entering booths, saying that their ballots had already been cast.

This was the first election in which the BNP campaigned without its leader Khaleda Zia – Ms Hasina’s arch rival.

The two women have alternated in power for most of the past three decades, but Khaleda has been in jail since last February on corruption charges she says are politically motivated. REUTERS

Kim Jong Un sends conciliatory note to Trump: Report

Letter-like message related to US-N. Korea talks was delivered through unspecified channel

SEOUL • North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has sent a “conciliatory message” to US President Donald Trump amid stalled nuclear negotiations, South Korea’s Chosun Ilbo newspaper reported yesterday.

Mr Kim’s “letter-like” message to Mr Trump was delivered last Friday through an unspecified channel, the newspaper reported, citing an unnamed diplomatic source.

The report did not include details about the message, but said it was related to US-North Korea talks and was conciliatory in tone.

On Sunday, the office of South Korean President Moon Jae-in said Mr Kim had sent a letter to his counterpart in Seoul saying that he

wants to hold more inter-Korean summits this year to achieve denuclearisation of the peninsula.

Neither the US State Department nor the US Embassy in Seoul had an immediate comment about the report of Mr Kim’s message to Mr Trump when contacted by Reuters.

Mr Moon’s office could not confirm the Chosun Ilbo report.

“There is a dialogue channel between North Korea and the United States through which they ex-

change active communication, but I cannot know whether it took the form of a letter or something else,” Mr Moon’s spokesman told a news conference yesterday.

At a summit with Mr Trump in Singapore in June last year, Mr Kim had vowed to work towards denuclearisation.

However, both sides have struggled to make progress on this matter. They are also yet to reschedule a meeting between US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and senior North Korean official Kim Yong Chol after an abrupt cancellation in November.

Pyeongyang’s state media has credited Mr Trump for his willingness to continue dialogue, but has also slammed the US State Department for tightening sanctions.

The stalled negotiations have had an impact on inter-Korean ties, with Mr Kim failing to visit Seoul last year as agreed to at an inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang in September.

The Chosun Ilbo report said Mr Kim wrote in the letter to Mr Moon that he would come to the South “in the near future” after giving a New Year’s address today.



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un reportedly sent a message to US President Donald Trump last Friday. Mr Kim also sent a letter to his counterpart in Seoul saying that he wants to hold more inter-Korean summits this year to achieve denuclearisation.



Mr Kim’s New Year address provides a rare public appearance for the young leader and is closely watched by neighbouring countries as it is seen as setting the tone for his domestic and foreign policies.

According to Mr Moon’s spokesman, Mr Kim said in the letter to the South Korean President that he was sorry his previously planned trip to Seoul did not take place, expressing his “strong resolve” to make it happen while monitoring the situation.

REUTERS

All eyes on Xi’s Taiwan speech in a year of sensitive anniversaries

BEIJING • China will kick off a year of sensitive anniversaries with a major speech tomorrow by President Xi Jinping on Taiwan, China’s most sensitive issue.

In 2019, China will celebrate 70 years since the founding of the People’s Republic of China.

Anniversaries are always touchy events in China, where maintaining stability is the ruling Communist Party’s overwhelming priority.

This year brings at least six anniversaries that could unsettle the party, from June’s 30 years since the Tiananmen crackdown to October’s 70 years since Mao Zedong proclaimed the founding of the People’s Republic at the end of a civil war.

However, it will be self-ruled Taiwan, proudly democratic and claimed by China as its own, that will be the focus of Mr Xi’s first important, pre-announced public event of the year.

State news agency Xinhua said yesterday that Mr Xi will give a major speech in Beijing’s Great Hall of the People on the 40th anniversary of a key policy statement that led to a thaw in relations with Taiwan, the “Message to Compatriots in Taiwan”.

Xinhua gave no other details.

Today also marks the 40th anniversary of the United States and China officially normalising relations, seven years after then President Richard Nixon made his historic visit to China, beginning that process.

On Jan 1, 1949, China declared an end to what had been routine artillery bombardment of Taiwan-controlled offshore islands close to China and offered to open up communications between the two sides, after decades of hostility.

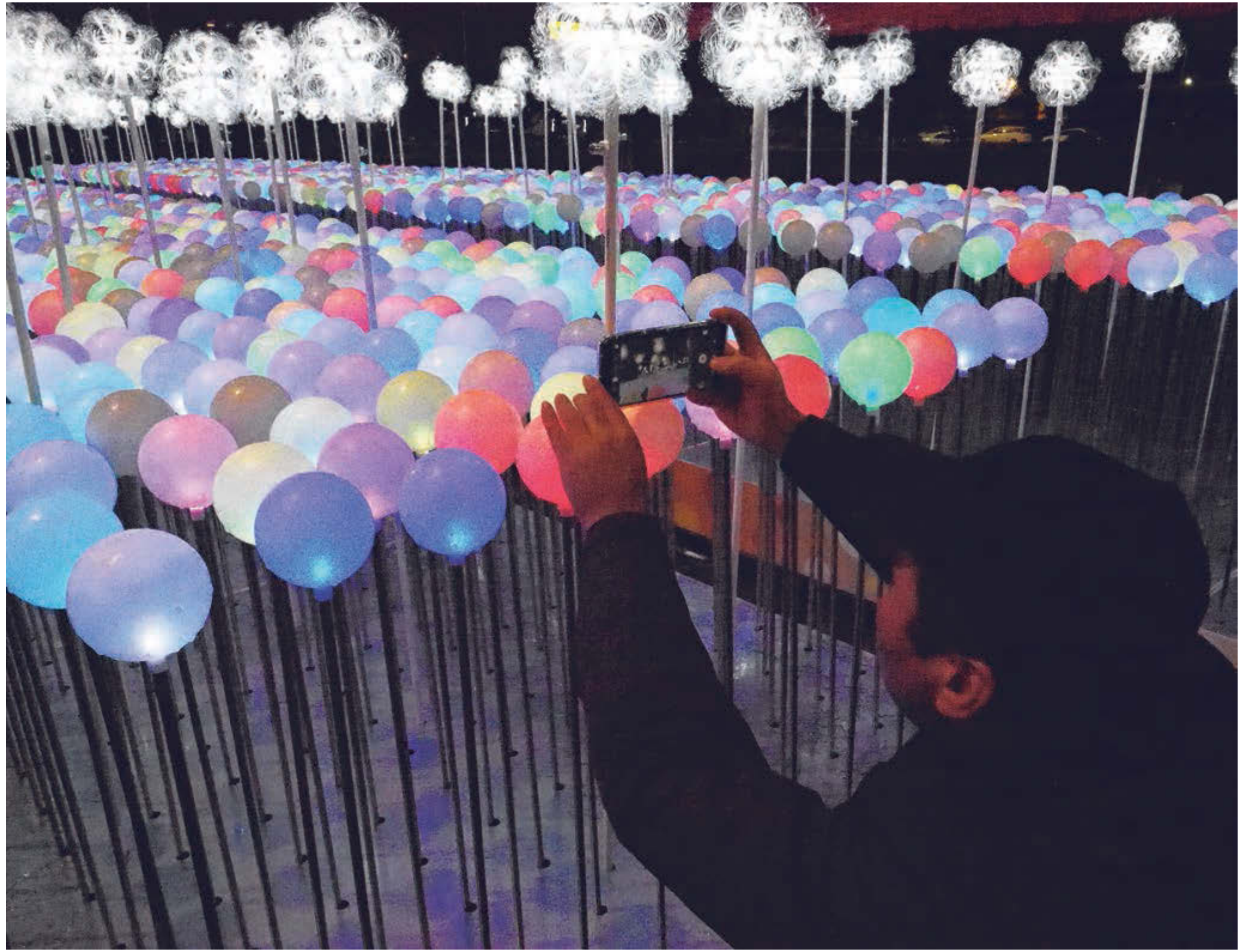
However, the offer was rebuffed by Taiwan’s then President Chiang Ching-kuo, who in April that year came out with a “Three Noes” policy of no contact, no compromise and no negotiation with China.

Mr Chiang relaxed that only in 1987, allowing people in Taiwan to visit China for family reunions.

His father, Chiang Kai-shek, fled with defeated Nationalist forces to Taiwan in December 1949 after losing a civil war to the Communists.

No formal peace treaty or formal end to hostilities has ever been signed.

Taiwan is gearing up for presiden-



A New Year art installation comprising 2,019 illuminated balloons in front of the Presidential Office Building in Taipei. Taiwan is the focus of Chinese President Xi Jinping’s first important, pre-announced public event of 2019. Mr Xi will give a major speech tomorrow on the 40th anniversary of a key policy statement that led to a thaw in relations with Taiwan. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

tial elections in January 2020.

President Tsai Ing-wen’s pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party suffered stinging losses to the China-friendly Kuom-

intang in mayoral and local elections in November.

China has heaped pressure on Ms Tsai since she took office in 2016, cutting off dialogue, whittling

down Taiwan’s few remaining diplomatic allies and forcing foreign airlines to list Taiwan as part of China on their websites.

China fears Ms Tsai wishes to

push for Taiwan’s formal independence, though she has said she wants to maintain the status quo.

Mr Xi said in March that Taiwan would face the “punishment of his-

tory” for any attempt at separatism, offering his strongest warning yet to the island claimed by China as its sacred territory.

REUTERS

Merkel calls for bigger German role to shore up multilateralism

BERLIN • Chancellor Angela Merkel has said that Germany must “stand fast, argue and fight for our own convictions” and assume greater responsibilities at a time when multilateralism is coming under intense pressure.

In her New Year’s address to Germans recorded on Sunday, Dr Merkel said long-held certainties about international cooperation were being put to the test.

Global challenges including climate change, immigration and the fight against terrorism could not be solved by countries going it alone, she warned.

“For our own interests, we want to solve all these questions, and we can do that best when we also take

into consideration the interests of others,” she said in a speech to be broadcast in full later yesterday.

“That is the lesson from two world wars of the last century,” she said, warning however that “certainties about international cooperation is falling under pressure”. “In our own interest, we must take on more responsibilities.”

With an eye to Germany taking on a non-permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council in 2019 and 2020, the leader of Europe’s biggest economy said her country would push for “global solutions”.

She also pledged to raise spending for humanitarian and development aid, as well as defence.

Although Dr Merkel did not name

US President Donald Trump in her speech, she has on previous occasions rejected his criticisms of multilateralism.

In his second appearance before the UN’s annual gathering last September, Mr Trump told the General Assembly that he and his administration “reject the ideology of globalism, and we embrace the doctrine of patriotism”.

A week later, Dr Merkel had warned Mr Trump against “destroying” the UN.

“I believe that destroying something without having developed something new is extremely dangerous,” Dr Merkel said at a regional election campaign event then. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



German Chancellor Angela Merkel, in her New Year address to the nation, said Germany must assume greater responsibilities at a time when multilateralism is coming under intense pressure. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

WORLD



JAIR BOLSONARO
BRAZIL'S NEW PRESIDENT
ALARMS NATION WITH
EMBRACE OF ISRAEL **A11**

Indonesian fisherman left stranded by tsunami rescued

24-year-old was out at sea when Anak Krakatau erupted, triggering deadly tsunami

Nur Asyiqin Mohamad Salleh
Indonesia Correspondent
In Jakarta

The tsunami came while Indonesian fisherman Ari Agus Arman Harianto was out at sea, crushing the boat he was in.

For an entire day, the 24-year-old clung to the rubble of his fishing boat to stay afloat.

He later managed to paddle his way to nearby Pulau Panjang – a small island close to the rumbling Anak Krakatau, which triggered the deadly Sunda Strait tsunami that struck on the evening of Dec 22.

Officers from the Indonesian navy rescued the fisherman on Sunday night when one of its ships came across him while surveying the condition of Anak Krakatau.

He was in a stable but weak condition after a week spent foraging for food while lost on the island – eating even the seeds of the ketapang tree.

“There, I ate whatever could be eaten,” Mr Agus, who is from Lam-

pung, told local media at a port in Banten yesterday, still pale from his ordeal.

A section of Anak Krakatau’s slope collapsed after it erupted on Dec 22, sliding into the ocean and displacing massive amounts of water that sent waves up to 5m high sweeping up coastlines.

More than 430 people have been killed, and over 7,000 injured.

On Sunday, the Indonesian authorities said the eruption of Anak Krakatau had stopped.

Seismographic data from Serung Islands, a cluster of islands near Anak Krakatau, showed that there were no more unusual tremors at the volcano, with the average amplitude of volcanic activity standing at 10mm, said the Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation Centre in a statement.

Anak Krakatau’s average amplitude during an eruption was 25mm to 30mm.

The volcano – whose name means “Child of Krakatau” – lies in the Sunda Strait that separates Java and Sumatra islands.

However, officials from the Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation Centre made it clear in their statement that the finding did not rule out the possibility of the volcano erupting anew in the near future.



Fisherman Ari Agus Arman Harianto, whose boat was crushed in the Sunda Strait tsunami, was rescued from an island near Anak Krakatau by Indonesian navy officers on Sunday. PHOTO: TNI LANAL BANTEN

The tsunami that hit both parts of Java and Sumatra was the third major natural disaster to strike Indonesia last year following earthquakes in Lombok, and quakes and a tsunami in Sulawesi.

The authorities last Thursday raised the danger alert for Anak Krakatau to three, the second-highest on the four-level scale. A no-go

On Sunday, the Indonesian authorities said the eruption of Anak Krakatau had stopped.

zone around it was expanded from 2km to 5km.

The authorities also said residents and tourists should still refrain from going to areas within a radius of 5km from Krakatau’s crater.

Anak Krakatau, which emerged in 1927 from the caldera that was formed during the eruption of Krakatau in 1883 that killed more than 36,000, has seen increased activity in recent months.

Indonesia’s Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation Centre said yesterday morning that the volcano experienced tremors four times from midnight up to 6am Jakarta time.

The waters around Anak Krakatau, however, were calm.

Meanwhile, the authorities around the globe are working on how they can prepare for the kind of freak tsunami that battered Indonesian coastlines.

Most tsunamis on record have been triggered by earthquakes. But this time, it was an eruption of Anak Krakatau volcano that caused its crater to partially collapse into the sea at high tide, sending waves smashing into the densely populated coastal areas.

During the eruption, an estimated 180 million cubic metres, or around two-thirds of the volcanic island, collapsed into the sea.

Experts said the disaster should be a wake-up call for countries to step up research on tsunami triggers and preparedness, according to Reuters.

“Indonesia has demonstrated to the rest of the world the huge variety of sources that have the potential to cause tsunamis,” seismologist Stephen Hicks at the University of Southampton told Reuters.

“More research is needed to understand those less-expected events.”

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The snow-covered Shanshan wetland in Wuhan, Hubei province, on Sunday. Public transport in parts of China has been suspended as snowstorms hit. PHOTO: REUTERS

China on blizzard alert as cold snap spreads

SHANGHAI/HONG KONG • China has issued a blizzard alert as temperatures around the country plunged, shutting down train lines and bus routes, and grounding some flights.

The National Meteorological Centre issued a Code Blue alert, with heavy snowstorms closing in on regions in the eastern and southern provinces of Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Anhui and Hunan.

China has a four-tier colour-coded weather warning system,

with red representing the most severe, followed by orange, yellow and blue.

Freezing temperatures and heavy snow saw high-speed rail lines linking southern Hunan province to the manufacturing hubs of Guangzhou and Shenzhen suspended.

Bus services in Hunan’s capital Changsha were suspended due to a snowstorm.

In nearby Hubei province, metro workers woke up before dawn to

battle against the snow and keep the underground rail network open, while flights from the cities of Changsha and Wuhan were halted on Sunday morning. The flights were able to resume later in the day.

According to the national observatory, the cold snap is expected to hit many parts of the country before easing after today.

In Hong Kong, temperatures have dropped sharply to below 10 deg C in many parts of the city.

The average winter temperature last year was around 20 deg C.

The Hong Kong Observatory said the cold weather will persist for more than a week, with winds and rain. The Home Affairs Department has opened 18 temporary shelters for people in need.

Six people, aged 50 to 90, were hospitalised with hypothermia and one of them died on Sunday, the South China Morning Post reported. REUTERS, XINHUA

Tornado sweeps through village in Java

JAKARTA • A tornado swept through an Indonesian village in Cirebon in West Java province on Sunday, killing one person and causing widespread destruction. The powerful winds have reportedly damaged 165 houses in the area.

National Disaster Mitigation Agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho said on his Twitter account that the *puting beliung* (tornado), which took place at about 3.30pm, had caused blackouts in most parts of the area.

The tornado also caused considerable damage in two Muslim prayer rooms.

He posted a video of the tornado and two other videos showing the damage done to the Desa Panuguran Kulon village.

Before the tornado hit the village on Sunday afternoon, the weather was reported to have been cloudy. The utility authorities have continued to work to repair power grids damaged by the tornado.

West Java province is located next to Banten province on the main island of Java. Banten and a neighbouring province on Sumatra island were recently hit by a tsunami caused by the partial collapse of Anak Krakatau volcano that caused giant waves to hit ashore, killing more than 430 people.

THE JAKARTA POST/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



The tornado, which swept through a village in Indonesia’s Cirebon on Sunday, killed one person and reportedly damaged 165 homes. PHOTO: YOUTUBE



Who are the Sentinelese?

Thought to number between 15 and 150, the Sentinelese are one of the most isolated communities on earth.

They are believed to be direct descendants of the first humans who left Africa, and have been living on the 60 sq km North Sentinel island for more than 60,000 years with hardly any change to their hunter-gatherer lifestyle.

They have fiercely resisted outside contact. Some argue it could be because of their traumatic interaction with British "taming" expeditions in the 19th century.

This opposition to outsiders, combined with their endangered status, has resulted in official Indian policy to let them go on with their chosen way of life.

It is feared that outside contact could obliterate their ancient culture and threaten the whole community as their immune systems may not have developed to combat common infections.

Debarshi Dasgupta

Dr Madhumala Chattopadhyay and her team broke the ice with the Sentinelese by offering them lots of coconuts. PHOTOS: COURTESY OF MADHUMALA CHATTOPADHYAY

The woman who befriended the Sentinelese

Anthropologist and team made the only two recorded friendly contacts with tribesmen

Debarshi Dasgupta
India Correspondent
In New Delhi

Determined to bring Christianity to a tribe that has shunned contact with the rest of the world, American missionary John Allen Chau was reportedly killed by the Sentinelese when he landed on their shores in November, in a story that has travelled across the world.

In a lesser-known encounter on Jan 4, 1991, two boats with outsiders drifted close to the island inhabited by the Sentinelese, to a location that today seems ironically named – Allen Point.

Its wary occupants were on the verge of creating history. They were minutes away from the first of the only two recorded friendly contacts with this little-known tribe in India's Andaman and Nicobar islands.

On one of the boats was Dr Madhumala Chattopadhyay from the Anthropological Survey of India, some team members and sackloads of coconuts meant to break the ice with the Sentinelese.

Coconuts do not grow on the North Sentinel, where the Sentinelese have lived in isolation for as long as 60,000 years. This is why the fruit has been a precious gift in government contact missions that have tried to befriend them since the 1970s. All of them failed – repelled by the tribesmen's feared marksmanship with their bows and arrows – until that morning in January 1991.

Seated in her office in New Delhi, where she is a joint director of the Department of Social Justice and

Empowerment, Dr Chattopadhyay, now 56, shared details with The Straits Times last month of her team's experience.

As their ship neared the coast, the team saw smoke rising from behind the foliage. They got onto the lifeboats and started to approach the island. They threw some of the coconut sacks into the water as a sign of goodwill.

Soon, some Sentinelese showed up to pick up the sacks that had washed ashore. The team made gestures inviting them to come and take the coconuts.

"We moved the boat really slow, so slow that its movement could not be easily detected," said Dr Chattopadhyay.

"The Sentinelese moved towards us gradually. It was tense as we were within their arrow range and they could have fired arrows at us at any moment."

The team decided to drop the coconuts one by one to prolong this first interaction, which lasted more than six hours.

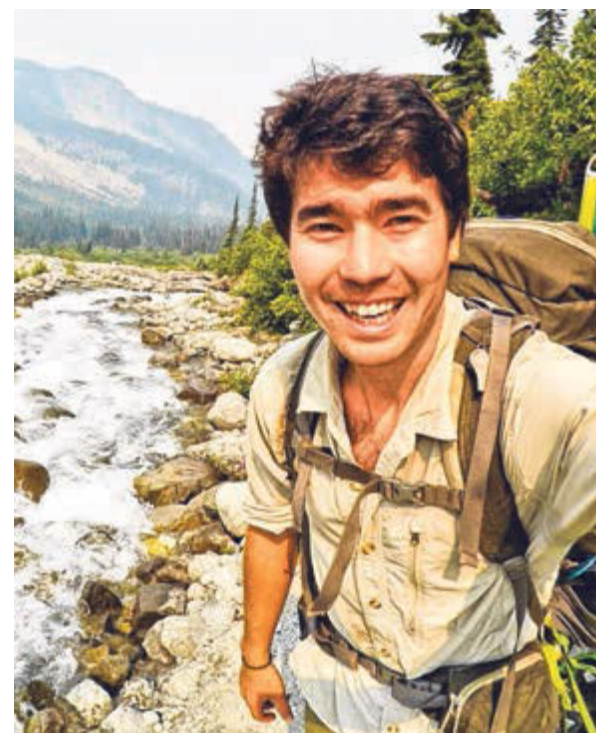
"The Sentinelese were observing us for a long time and it took a while for them to overcome their fear and start picking up the coconuts from the water," she said.

Some tribesmen then swam up to the boat and the team members jumped into the knee-deep water. "They started touching the boat as if they were playing with it... they were even taking them from our hands," said Dr Chattopadhyay.

It is hard to say what helped to turn the tide. Some people believe it could be the presence of Dr Chattopadhyay, a woman, and the only one who went on these government missions.

"They may have interpreted my presence as a sign that the team meant no harm," she said.

At one point, when a tribesman picked up an arrow and aimed it at



The Sentinelese made contact with Dr Chattopadhyay (above) with caution, but killed missionary John Allen Chau (left) when he landed on their shores. PHOTO: REUTERS

WRONG MISSION

Not only did Chau not have permission to be there, he also should not have tried to convert them to another religion... They are animist and have a close relationship with nature and venerate it.



DR MADHUMALA CHATTOPADHYAY, on the ill-fated attempt by American missionary John Allen Chau to convert the Sentinelese.

the group, she spoke to the woman next to him in a language spoken by another community on the archipelago: "Kairi ise ra (Mother, come here), nariyali jaba jaba (more and more coconuts)."

It was something Dr Chattopadhyay had picked up, given her years of field work on the islands.

"The woman quickly flicked the wrist of the man taking aim and the arrow mercifully fell into the water," the anthropologist recounted. The woman then sent the man to get the coconuts.

Dr Chattopadhyay's journey to North Sentinel began with a Kolkata newspaper report she

stumbled on when she was around 12. It spoke of the jubilation among the Onges, one of the indigenous tribes in the islands, after the birth of a child.

"I really wanted to visit them during the holidays, but my father told me only professionals like journalists or researchers get to go and see these people," she said.

This led her to study anthropology – a term she did not even understand initially.

"I had to ask a professor what the word meant before submitting my admission form. All I knew was that I wanted to study and work on the tribes in the Andaman and Nicobar islands," she added.

To secure a spot on the boat that day was not easy – she fought patriarchy and even professional rivalry.

The contact team returned with some other members for a second friendly encounter on Feb 21, 1991.

This time, the Sentinelese showed up without bows and arrows. Two of the tribesmen even got onto the boat and helped themselves to sacks of coconuts.

The third encounter failed because of inclement weather, following which the missions were called off. "We felt there was little else that could be gained from these encounters," said Dr Chattopadhyay.

Since then, the tribe has remained living in obscurity but for a few encounters with the outside world – like the one with Mr Chau or the two fishermen who were killed by the tribe in 2006.

"Not only did Chau not have permission to be there, he also should not have tried to convert them to another religion," she said.

"They are animist and have a close relationship with nature and venerate it, which possibly helped them survive the tsunami in 2004."

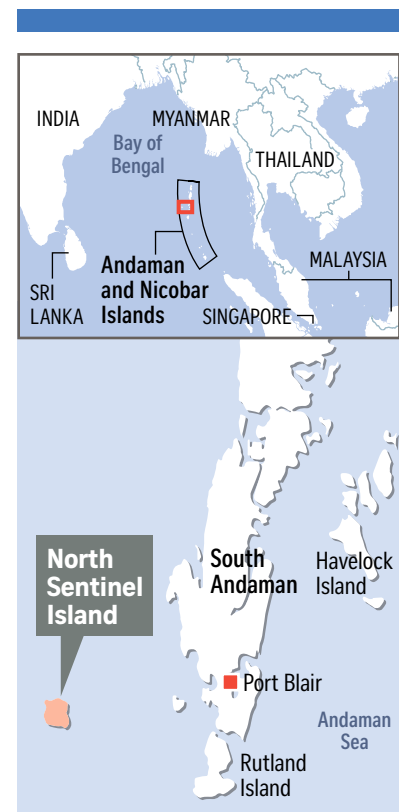
These government contact missions and the relationship the indigenous tribes of this archipelago in the Bay of Bengal have had with the outside world, including the Indian state, have yielded little benefits for them.

The Great Andamanese, for instance, were reduced from 7,000 in the 19th century to 44 because of conflict with British colonial forces and diseases like measles and syphilis.

"We should not try to change their self-sustaining way of life. They should be contacted only when there is a need, such as to ensure they are doing fine in case of a natural calamity," said Dr Chattopadhyay.

"The Sentinelese are the kings of their land. We should let them remain that way."

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Source: AFP STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

No more plastic bags at S. Korean supermarkets

SEOUL • South Korea is banning major supermarkets and retailers nationwide from using disposable plastic bags, in an attempt to conserve natural resources and reduce recyclable waste, government officials were reported as saying yesterday.

The ban comes into effect today, as part of a revised law on conserving resources and encouraging the

reuse of recyclable waste, reported Yonhap news agency.

Subject to the ban are 2,000 outlets of major discount chains and 11,000 supermarkets with sales floor spaces of 165 sq m or more, the report said.

Currently, such retailers are banned from handing out free plastic bags.

Under the new regulation, shops

are required to offer customers recyclable containers, cloth shopping bags or paper bags.

Stores that violate the ban could face fines of up to three million won (\$3,700), Yonhap said.

Plastic containers for wet goods, such as meat and fish, will still be used.

Some 18,000 bakeries nationwide will also be barred from hand-

ing out free disposable plastic bags after the new law kicks in.

In cooperation with local governments, the Environment Ministry plans to encourage the affected stores to observe the ban from this month through March.

The ministry is also pushing ahead with a plan to reduce the use of plastic garment bags at laundrettes.

Asia watch

Time for new beginnings amid uncertainty

Shefali Rekhi
Asia News Network Editor

After the upheavals and shocks of 2018, the New Year is set to usher in change and hopes of improvement on many fronts.

Several announcements are due to take effect today and throughout the rest of the month. They include the following:

China's tariff cuts

Beijing's move to remove import and export tariffs on a range of goods takes effect today. The list includes import taxes on alternative raw materials that can be used to make animal feed.

China had been relying heavily on US soya bean imports for animal feed, but imposed tariffs of 25 per cent on them amid Beijing's spat with Washington.

While China has resumed some purchases of US soya beans, the tariffs on oilseed from America remain in place.

Meanwhile, US will refrain from raising tariffs on the import of US\$200 billion (\$\$273 billion) worth of goods from China from 10 per cent to 25 per cent today, with the two countries now working to improve relations during a 90-day ceasefire period reached between the leaders of the two countries on Dec 2.

Bloomberg reports that a trade delegation from the United States is due to visit China on Jan 7.

New US acting Defence Secretary

Deputy Defence Secretary Patrick Shanahan assumes the post of acting Defence Secretary today, replacing Mr James Mattis, who was becoming widely regarded as an assuring voice on America's ties with Asia in the Donald Trump era. Mr Shanahan is a former Boeing executive who was nominated for the Pentagon post by President Trump in 2017.

Orchard Road smoking ban

Singapore's latest measure to improve public health and the environment kicks off today. Orchard Road will go smoke-free, with a ban on smoking in public areas, and lighting-up being allowed only in designated areas.

Qatar quits Opec

Qatar, which is focusing on developing its natural gas production and distribution capabilities, has announced it will be quitting the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) cartel from today. The move may be symbolic, but those trading in oil and natural gas will be watching for further announcements.

Malaysia's ban on fish, shrimp exports

Malaysia's prohibition on exports of wild-caught fish and shrimp this month and next – in an effort to plug domestic shortages – comes



Beijing's plan to remove tariffs on alternative raw materials that can be used to make animal feed starts today. It has resumed some purchases of soya beans, such as those from this farm in the United States, after imposing tariffs of 25 per cent amid its trade spat with Washington.
PHOTO: REUTERS

World leaders, business heads, policymakers and others will meet to discuss issues under this year's theme – Globalisation 4.0: Shaping A Global Architecture In The Age Of The Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Seoul-Beijing bilateral talks on environment

Representatives from the two countries are due to meet on Jan 23 and 24 in Seoul for discussions on cross-border environment issues. The discussions will focus on reducing fine dust pollution, with South Korea pushing policies to reduce the inflow of hazardous particles from China, The Korea Herald reports.

Former Jakarta governor's release

Jakarta's former governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, who is better known by his Chinese nickname Ahok, is expected to be released from prison on Jan 24.

He is serving a two-year term after a Jakarta court found him guilty of blasphemy against Islam. Police are making security arrangements, with his supporters and opponents expected to gather.

Donations for tsunami victims

Mercy Relief's fund-raising appeal in Singapore for tsunami victims in Indonesia is open till Jan 25.

Singapore Bicentennial

A series of events starts on Jan 28, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles to Singapore.

Trump's State of the Union address

US President Donald Trump is to make the annual State of the Union address to Congress on Jan 30, when he will share his accomplishments and outline his agenda for the coming year.

Malaysia to unveil anti-graft strategy

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad is due to unveil the country's five-year plan to tackle corruption on Jan 31.

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• Asia Watch is a monthly feature on happenings around the world of interest to the region, published in The Straits Times on the first weekday of the month.

Thousands gather for thanksgiving procession in Manila



Thousands of Catholics jostled to get closer to the Black Nazarene statue during a thanksgiving procession in Manila yesterday.

Every year, before the start of the New Year, barefoot devotees in the Philippines gather for the procession of the Black Nazarene – a life-size statue of a dark-skinned Jesus carrying a cross – in the capital's Quiapo district.

Many Filipino Catholics consider the Nazarene statue, which is kept for most of the year above the altar at the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene in Quiapo, to have healing powers.
PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Tough talks expected over South China Sea code of conduct

HONG KONG • Tough negotiations lie ahead over a new pact between China and South-east Asian nations aimed at easing tensions in the South China Sea.

Vietnam is pushing for provisions which are likely to prove unpalatable to Beijing, documents reviewed by Reuters suggest.

Hanoi wants the pact to outlaw many of the actions Beijing has taken over the disputed waterway in recent years, including artificial island building, blockades and offensive weaponry such as missile deployments, according to a negotiating draft of the Asean Code of Conduct (COC) seen by Reuters.

The 19-page draft shows Hanoi is also pushing for a ban on any new Air Defence Identification Zone – something Beijing announced over the East China Sea in 2013.

Beijing officials have not ruled out a similar move – in which all aircraft must identify themselves to the Chinese authorities – over the South China Sea.

Hanoi is also demanding that states clarify their maritime claims in the vital trade route according to international law – an apparent attempt to shatter the controversial “nine-dash line” by which China claims and patrols much of the South China Sea, the draft shows.

“Going forward, there will be some very testy exchanges between the Vietnamese and China in particular over the text of this agreement,” said Singapore-based Ian Storey, a veteran South China Sea expert, who has seen the draft.

“Vietnam is including those points or activities they want forbidden by the Code of Conduct precisely because China has been carrying these out for the last 10 years.”

Ms Le Thi Thu Hang, a spokesman for Vietnam's Foreign Ministry, said negotiations on the COC had made some progress, with Hanoi actively participating and other governments showing “con-

structive and cooperative spirit”.

“Vietnam wishes related countries to continue their efforts and make a positive contribution to the negotiation process in order to achieve a substantive and effective COC in accordance with international law, especially the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea,” she said.

Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have conflicting claims with China in parts of the South China Sea.

The draft also confirms earlier reports that China wants military drills with outside powers in the South China Sea to be blocked, un-

less all signatories agree to them.

In addition, Beijing wants to exclude foreign oil firms by limiting joint development deals to China and South East Asia.

Experts expect both elements to be strongly resisted by some Asean countries.

“That is unacceptable,” one South-east Asian diplomat told Reuters, referring specifically to the suggested ban on military drills with countries outside the region.

China's Foreign Ministry, in a statement sent to Reuters, said negotiations on the code were confidential, and it could not comment on their content.

The next round of working-level talks is expected to take place in Myanmar in the first quarter of this year, the South-east Asian diplomat said. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has called for the pact to be sealed by 2021, a timetable some envoys and analysts are sceptical can be reached.

Dr Bonnie Glaser, a regional security expert at the Centre for International and Strategic Studies in Washington, said she believed China's more controversial proposals would prove unacceptable to several key Asean members, as well as to the United States and its allies.
REUTERS

Brazil steps up security for presidential inauguration

Anti-defence systems among measures taken for Bolsonaro's swearing-in today

BRASILIA • Anti-missile defences and warplanes are set to be activated today as part of a security shield for the investiture of Brazil's new President, Mr Jair Bolsonaro.

The measures in, around and over the capital Brasilia will be on par with those deployed during Brazil's hosting of the World Cup soccer tournament in 2014, or the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio.

For Mr Bolsonaro, a 63-year-old former paratrooper, long an obscure far-right politician before being elected to his country's highest office last October, the added security measures during his inaugura-

tion parade and ceremony are nothing out of the ordinary.

Last September, while campaigning, he was almost killed when a mentally unstable man plunged a knife into his abdomen.

Today, he will proceed along an esplanade in Brazil's capital in an event attended by at least 10 foreign heads of state and government, and other high-ranking representatives.

Among them will be Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who both require heightened protection when travelling.

A public crowd of between 250,000 and 500,000 is expected to turn out – but umbrellas and backpacks will be forbidden.

Frequencies used to control drones will be blocked, but not mobile phone signals.

The Brazilian authorities said more than 3,000 uniformed security personnel will be stationed around the ceremony area, setting up and manning roadblocks and pedestrian checkpoints with metal detectors. They declined to detail other ground measures.

At the same time, the Brazilian air force will deploy more than 20

fighter jets, air force operations chief Ricardo Cesar Mangrich told reporters.

Anti-aircraft missile systems were also to be used, to create a 46km radius off-limits to all but authorised aircraft, with a smaller no-fly "red zone" at its centre, he said.

The Brasilia esplanade, said Mr Mangrich, "is going to be the best-defended area in the history of our aerospace defence system".

The Brazilian authorities have conducted repetitions to make sure things run smoothly on inauguration day.

On Sunday, a few thousand members of the public, many wearing the green and yellow of Brazil's flag, turned up to watch the last practice run, but were held back by roadblocks.

"We're a bit disappointed, but it will be better when it happens, in two days' time," said 49-year-old Brasilia resident Silvia Capital, who is hosting relatives from elsewhere in the country who have come to the capital especially to see the event.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Maliki in Brazil for Bolsonaro ceremony

Singapore's Senior Minister of State for Defence and Foreign Affairs, Dr Mohamad Maliki Osman, is in Brazil for a two-day visit to attend the inauguration of the President-elect of Brazil, Mr Jair Bolsonaro.

During his visit, Dr Maliki will also call on Brazil's Foreign Minister Ernesto Araujo to reaffirm the warm and substantive ties between Singapore and Brazil.

Dr Maliki will be accompanied by officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The visit ends tomorrow.



Ceremonial guards preparing for the inauguration of Mr Jair Bolsonaro as Brazil's President in Brasilia today. More than 3,000 uniformed security personnel will be stationed around the ceremony area. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Brazil moving its embassy to Jerusalem matter of when, not if: Netanyahu

RIO DE JANEIRO • Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said that Brazil's President-elect Jair Bolsonaro told him it was a matter of "when, not if" he moves his country's embassy in Israel to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv.

Far-right Mr Bolsonaro, who takes office today and is hosting Mr

Netanyahu and the leaders of other countries for his inauguration, has said he would like to follow the lead of United States President Donald Trump and move the embassy.

But he has come under pressure from Brazil's powerful agriculture sector not to do so as it could hurt the country's exports to Arab nations.

Despite Mr Netanyahu's comments, a senior official from Brazil's incoming government told Reuters on Sunday that no decision had yet been made.

Such a move by Mr Bolsonaro would be a sharp shift in Brazilian foreign policy, which has traditionally backed a two-state solution to

the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Arab League had told Mr Bolsonaro that moving Brazil's embassy to Jerusalem would be a setback for relations with Arab countries, according to a letter seen by Reuters last month.

"Mr Bolsonaro told me it was 'when, not if' he moves the embassy

to Jerusalem," Mr Netanyahu said on Sunday at a meeting with leaders of Brazil's Jewish community in Rio de Janeiro. "We attach enormous importance to Brazil and Brazil in the context of Latin America. This heralds a historic change."

Mr Netanyahu, who met Mr Bolsonaro last Friday, also said the

Brazilian had accepted his invitation to visit Israel, a trip that is likely to take place in March.

Mr Netanyahu is the first Israeli prime minister to visit Brazil. After he met the Israeli leader, Mr Bolsonaro said "we need good allies, good friends, good brothers, such as Benjamin Netanyahu". REUTERS

Russian apartment block blast kills three

MOSCOW • At least three people were killed and a further 79 left unaccounted for after a gas explosion rocked a residential building in the Russian city of Magnitogorsk yesterday, a senior official said.

The explosion, which occurred in the early hours when many of the residents were asleep, led to a partial collapse of the high-rise apartment building, reports said.

Media outlets in the city, located 1,700km east of Moscow in the southern Urals, said it was unclear how many people were trapped in the debris but cries for help could be heard from beneath the rubble.

"Three people have been pulled alive from the rubble and three are dead," Mr Oleg Klimov, deputy governor of the Chelyabinsk region



The gas explosion took place in the early hours, when many residents were asleep, and led to a partial collapse of the high-rise building. PHOTO: REUTERS

where the industrial city is located, was quoted as saying by state news agency RIA Novosti.

"The fate of 79 people is unclear," Mr Klimov said, adding that the police were working to locate

their whereabouts.

RIA news agency said 110 people lived in the building and 48 apartments had been damaged. Yesterday was a public holiday in Russia. REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Macron's ex-bodyguard admits using diplomatic passports after dismissal

PARIS • The disgraced former bodyguard of French President Emmanuel Macron has admitted he used his diplomatic passports "for personal convenience" after being fired in August, a day after investigators opened a probe into his failure to return the documents.

Mr Alexandre Benalla, a former campaign bodyguard who got a senior job following Mr Macron's election victory in 2017, has been dogged by scandal since July when accusations emerged that he had roughed up protesters.

Mr Macron's office and Mr Benalla clashed this week over claims that he used two diplomatic passports after his dismissal, which the foreign ministry said would be a crime.

Criticism over the presidency's handling of the issue has been growing since local media reported that Mr Benalla met African presidents, in what officials fear was an attempt to profit from his former insider status.

In an interview published on Sun-

day, Mr Benalla acknowledged using the passports for private travel but said he would return them to the foreign ministry "within days".

"I may have been wrong to use these passports," he told French newspaper Le Journal du Dimanche. "But I did it for personal convenience to facilitate my passage through airports. Under no circumstances did I use them for business," he added.

He said he had returned the passports at the end of August, but they were handed back to him along with other personal belongings by a "presidential aide" in October.

"Insofar as they were given back to me, I didn't see any reason not to use them," he told the paper.

Prosecutors last Saturday opened a preliminary investigation for "abuse of trust", the illegal use of professional documents and other charges.

Mr Macron's office said it had no information about the use of Mr

Benalla's passports, which it said were assigned only for work in his official capacity.

Mr Benalla was at the centre of a major scandal last year after accusations emerged he had beaten up demonstrators at a May Day rally in Paris while he was wearing a police helmet. He was working for the presidency at the time.

He was not fired until after the media revelations, prompting a wave of accusations from government opponents that Mr Macron's office covered it up.

Mr Benalla has denied boasting of insider influence to win work after his sacking and has accused members of Mr Macron's team of trying to "wreck" his life.

The negative headlines over Mr Benalla came at a sensitive time for Mr Macron, who has seen his popularity plummet during weeks of anti-government protests over some of his economic reforms. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WORLD FOCUS



Students buying bubble tea at an outlet of the JLD Dragon brand of shops in Xinyi district, Taipei. Today, bubble tea is popular not just in Taiwan but also around the world. ST PHOTO: LEE SEOK HWAI



A family learning to make pearl milk tea at Kili Bay Milk Tea Cultural Centre in Yilan, Taiwan. Taiwanese drink more than a billion cups of bubble tea a year, or an average of 44 cups a person. PHOTO: FACEBOOK/KILI BAY MILK TEA CULTURAL CENTRE



US presidential candidate Hillary Clinton drinking bubble tea at Kung Fu Tea at a mall outlet in the Queens borough of New York City while campaigning in 2016. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Bubbling over: The globalisation of a tea craze

Bubble tea, which started in Taiwan, has won fans worldwide, with industry worth \$60b

Lee Seok Hwai
Assistant Foreign Editor

TAIPEI/SINGAPORE • Singaporean Calvin Lee expected to be drinking a lot of coffee during a holiday in Vietnam last year, until he chanced upon bubble tea brand Gong Cha. On more recent holidays in Seoul and Melbourne, he spotted the Taiwanese chain and other bubble tea brands such as Share Tea and CoCo. "I was surprised (to see that bubble tea is available in so many places)," said Mr Lee, 27, a resource development executive who often blogs about food.

More than 30 years ago, a tea seller shook things up in Taiwan with a new sugary beverage named for the bubbles formed when tea is shaken. Today, bubble tea is popular not just in Taiwan but also around the world.

Thousands of shops have sprung up in recent years in countries from Russia to South Africa and Canada to New Zealand as bubble tea, in its myriad flavours and toppings, captures diverse young consumers.

The number of stores franchised or supplied by Taiwanese firms globally is expected to hit 13,000 this year, and the entire industry worldwide is worth up to US\$50 billion (\$68 billion), or about 8 per cent of Taiwan's gross domestic product, according to government and industry estimates.

That is not counting outlets of non-Taiwanese origins, like those run by mainland Chinese operators. In Singapore, no fewer than 10 Taiwanese brands, such as Ten Ren and Tiger Sugar, entered the market last year.

Once a humble thirst-quencher sold in night markets and kerbside shops, bubble tea is now also up-wardly mobile. You can get it at drive-throughs in Silicon Valley, at the mall underneath the Louvre Museum in Paris, at tea bars in Tokyo's Roppongi area and at a 24-hour stall at Changi Airport.

"Bubble tea has become an international food synonymous with Taiwan, just like sushi from Japan and



chicken rice from Singapore," said Taiwanese industry veteran Jacky Wang, whose Taipei-based company Possmei International has helped create more than 100 bubble tea brands globally.

TEA AT THE LOUVRE

Among the biggest players are Chatime, CoCo, Comebuy, Quickly and Gong Cha. Together, the 10 biggest Taiwanese brands account for some 10,000 outlets. Chatime, founded in 2004, has around 2,000 stores in Taiwan and elsewhere in the world, including recent launches in the Czech Republic, Mauritius and Mexico, a company executive told The Straits Times. Five years ago, it had just 1,000 stores worldwide.

"The overseas market is what we are focusing on now," said the executive, who spoke on condition of anonymity as per company policy. In Indonesia, for example, Chatime opened 100 shops last year, bumping the country total to 300. Singapore is also on the company's expansion plans, the official added.

But it is Chatime's Louvre outpost that made headlines last year. Opened in July at a cost of NT\$20

Bubble tea boom



million (\$S908,000), the shop at the Carrousel du Louvre is billed as the first by an Asian beverage brand at the world-famous attraction.

The Chatime executive declined to reveal revenue figures, but let on that "it has met our expectations".

Another name that had consumers talking recently is TP Tea. Not only did the 14-year-old brand open a 24-hour outlet at Changi Airport Terminal 2 last year, it also lays claim to being Singapore's first halal-certified bubble tea chain.

Such innovations are part of its aggressive international expansion

plan as the market in Taiwan approaches saturation. "The market in Taiwan is shifting our focus overseas," deputy operations manager Kenny Lee told ST, noting that TP Tea has nearly 250 shops in Taiwan and only 21 abroad so far.

The froth comes from a growth spurt that emerged some five years ago at in Taiwan.

The number of beverage shops on the island – the bulk of which hawk bubble tea – has soared 40 per cent since 2013 and totalled more than 18,000 by end-September last year.

As at 2017, there were 142 brands, up 27 per cent since 2013.

Taiwanese consume more than one billion cups of the drink a year, or an average of 44 cups per person, going by government estimates.

To Ms Charlotte Chiang, a Taiwanese apparel designer in her 20s, "there is no better friend at work than a cup of bubble tea".

"That stuff is liquid dessert you ingest with a straw, leaving your fingers free to pound furiously away on your computer," Ms Chiang, who works in the Neihsu district of Taipei, told ST.

She has been hooked on the calorific beverage for five years now, and downs up to four cups a week. "I'm drinking more these days simply because there are so many brands and flavours to choose from," she added. Her favourite is a version with brown sugar tapioca balls, or "pearls", by a brand called Jenjudan.

CUSTOMISED

If the name sounds familiar, that is because it is inspired by gongfu movie star Donnie Yen, better known to Chinese-speaking audiences as Zhen Zi Dan.

The brand is one of dozens of am-

bitious upstarts muscling their way into the market even as more established players venture far and wide.

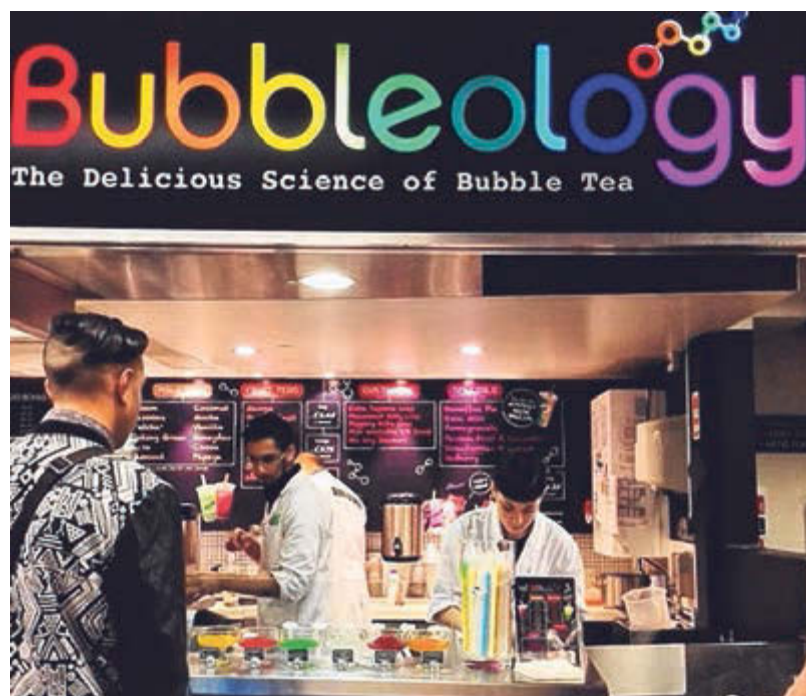
What began as a pushcart stall in Taipei's famous Shih Lin night market in 2010 is now a 32-store – and counting – burgeoning multinational operation.

The company, which launched outlets in Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Macau last year, is planting its flag in Singapore, Australia, Canada and Japan this year, spokesman Irene Pan said.

"Ultimately, we hope our company can take on 10 competitors at one go, just like Zhen Zi Dan," quipped Ms Pan.

She declined to disclose details about the company's Singapore franchisee, citing a confidentiality agreement, and would only say that the franchisee had been undergoing training in Taiwan, and the Singapore shop is due to open in the first half of this year.

Both Jenjudan and TP Tea adapt their formula, decor and menu to the tastes in each of their offshore markets. Jenjudan's store in Hong Kong's Causeway Bay, for example, sports a more contemporary look and a pared-down menu compared with its lantern-embellished Tai-



(Above) The Taiwan-popularised drink being served at a Bubbleology bubble tea outlet in Britain. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/BUBBLEOLOGY

(Left) Chatime, one of Taiwan's top bubble tea brands, made headlines when it opened a shop at Paris' Carrousel du Louvre in July last year. PHOTO: CHATIME



Hong Kong entertainer Nicholas Tse (right) offering Taiwanese singer Jay Chou a cup of bubble tea during a television variety show. PHOTO: WEIBO/SINGCHINA

wane counterparts.

TP Tea kicks the sweetness up a notch in Vietnam, while its outlets in Japan don a minimalist look.

The strongest proof that bubble tea has gone truly global may lie in the companies that few consumers would have heard of.

Possmei, founded in 2008, is one of them. It does not have its own retail brands or outlets, but has helped clients set up more than 100 brands, such as Bubbleology in Britain and Cobo in the Philippines, founder Jacky Wang told ST at the company's headquarters in the Wugu district in New Taipei City.

Clients attend a seven-day course at the HQ where they get advice on the logo, decor, menu and packaging, as well as learn how to make different bubble tea flavours.

Once the client's store is set up, a Possmei representative is stationed onsite for a week or two to control quality and troubleshoot. The machinery and ingredients – tea leaves, tapioca pearls, creamer, flavourings – are supplied by Possmei and other Taiwanese manufacturers.

"Eighty per cent of our clients are foreigners from the United States, Europe, Russia and the Middle

East," said Mr Wang, 55. "We provide a one-stop platform that helps them to recreate the look and feel of, say, Koi, Gong Cha or Chatime. Or a mix of all three."

Last year, the firm's turnover was NT\$900 million, Mr Wang said.

Chen Tai Food Product Enterprise is the other big player. It offers the same "one-stop shop" solution for foreign bubble tea entrepreneurs as Possmei, but focuses more on Asia and boasts halal certification.

As the industry froths, Mr Lee of TP Tea said quality is key to standing out amid the intense competition. He claimed that TP Tea's brewing process takes 20 seconds longer than that of its competitors.

"We go the extra mile to ensure the perfect blend of ice, milk, tea and pearls," he said.

Mr Lee, the Singaporean aficionado, attests to the importance of consistency and scale. Gong Cha and Koi remain his favourite brands despite the influx of new ones.

"The quality has been consistent," he said. "They are also conveniently located in many places."

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• Additional reporting by Brenda Wu

BUBBLE TEA 3.0

The growth of the bubble-tea industry belies the cycles of boom and bust it weathered in the 1990s and 2000s before its resurgence five years ago.

The latest wave of the bubble tea craze – dubbed third generation by

industry veteran Jacky Wang, who used to supply ingredients to the likes of Quickly and 50 Lan, the Taiwanese parent of Koi – thrives on quality and packaging rather than cheap prices.

"This is the generation of luxe, of

quality. In the past, bubble tea was priced at about \$2 to \$3, now it's as much as \$6," he says.

The beverage has come a long way since 1983, when it was invented by Taiwanese tea enthusiast Liu Han-chieh. The then government employee, who had been drinking tea the traditional way – freshly brewed and undiluted from a teapot – since he was a child, came up with the idea of adding ice and

sugar to tea in a cocktail shaker after observing coffee subjected to the same treatment at a cafe in Japan.

Mr Liu quit his job and opened a shop in Taichung city. His innovation was called bubble tea for the bubbles that form when tea is shaken. Four years later, in 1987, a staff member came up with the idea of adding tiny chewy balls made with tapioca flour to iced tea. It was a hit, and "pearls", as the tapi-

oca balls were dubbed, were born.

As Mr Liu's shop, Chun Shui Tang, prospered, tea cafes that looked like modernised versions of traditional Chinese tea in tall glasses soon sprouted across Taiwan. A few made their way to Singapore, such as Bubble Tea Garden, which opened at Marina Square in 1992.

Corporate communications executive Susan Poh, 40, recalls hang-

ing out at one such outlet as an undergraduate. "In those days, bubble tea was served in cafes where patrons could also have snacks while enjoying the tea," she says.

It was not until the late 1990s, when cup-sealing machines were invented, that bubble tea morphed into its present takeaway form.

Shops proliferated, brands sprouted, and the craze took hold in not just Taiwan, but also over-

seas markets such as Singapore.

The fad reached its peak in 2001, when shops in Singapore reportedly sold as many as 1,000 cups a day. Many "brandless" entrepreneurs entered the business, armed with little experience or qualms about quality.

By 2002, operators were forced into price wars as the number of shops in the HDB heartland hit 5,000. Many lost money and most

folded by 2003. The industry suffered a similar blow in its Taiwan home market.

The bust weeded out smaller players. Established brands such as Quickly, Gong Cha and 50 Lan, the parent of Koi, emerged stronger and expanded abroad. Koi came to Singapore in 2007, followed by Gong Cha two years later.

As the industry matures, operators are focusing on the fundamen-

als. Where once drinks were made from powdered tea and served in stodgy cups, better ingredients like tea leaves and fresh milk, as well as customisation, are now de rigueur. Companies are also expanding their customer base, Mr Wang says, by attracting younger customers with innovative drinks and creative packaging.

Lee Seok Hwai



Mr Liu Han-chieh opened the first Chun Shui Tang bubble-tea shop (left) in Taichung, Taiwan, in 1983. PHOTOS: FACEBOOK/DU YU-JHE, CHUN SHUI TANG



Republican ‘reassured’ over troop pullout

Lindsey Graham says Trump is committed to defeating ISIS even as US forces leave Syria

WASHINGTON • A senior Republican US senator has said he emerged from a White House meeting with President Donald Trump reassured that Mr Trump is committed to defeating terror organisation ISIS, even as he plans to withdraw American troops from Syria.

Senator Lindsey Graham had earlier warned that removing all 2,000 US troops from Syria would hurt national security by allowing the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to rebuild, betraying US-backed Kurdish fighters of the YPG militia battling remnants of the militant group, and enhancing Iran's ability to threaten Israel.

During a morning television interview on Sunday, Mr Graham said he would ask Mr Trump to slow down the troop withdrawal, which was announced last month and drew widespread criticism.

An ally of Mr Trump, although he has opposed some of his foreign policy decisions, Mr Graham was, however, more upbeat after the meeting. “We talked about Syria. He told me some things I didn’t know that made me feel a lot better about where we’re headed in Syria,” Mr Graham, an influential voice on national security policy who sits on the Senate Armed Services Committee,

told reporters at the White House later.

“We still have some differences, but I will tell you that the President is thinking long and hard about Syria – how to withdraw our forces but at the same time achieve our national security interests,” Mr Graham said.

Last month, Mr Trump tweeted: “We have defeated ISIS in Syria, my only reason for being there during the Trump presidency.”

In the wake of the announcement, Mr Graham issued a scathing statement in which he denounced the decision as “an Obama-like mistake made by the Trump administration”.

“While American patience in confronting radical Islam may wane, the radical Islamists’ passion to kill Americans and our allies never wavers,” Mr Graham said.

Asked if Mr Trump had agreed to any slowing down of the troop withdrawal, Mr Graham said: “I think the President’s very committed to making sure that when we leave Syria, that ISIS is completely defeated.”

He said Mr Trump’s trip to Iraq last week was an eye-opener and he understood the need to “finish the job” with ISIS.



US Special Forces soldiers at a front line outpost outside Manbij, Syria, last February. The Pentagon says it is considering plans for a “deliberate and controlled withdrawal” from Syria. PHOTO: NYTIMES

“I think the President has come up with a plan with his generals that makes sense to me,” Mr Graham said.

He said later on Twitter that Mr Trump would make sure that any withdrawal from Syria “will be done in a fashion to ensure: 1) ISIS is permanently destroyed, 2) Iran doesn’t fill in the back end, 3) And our Kurdish allies are protected.”

The Pentagon has said it is consid-

ering plans for a “deliberate and controlled withdrawal”.

One option, according to a person familiar with the discussions, is for a 120-day pullout period.

Mr Graham told reporters that Mr Trump was committed to making sure Turkey did not clash with the Kurdish YPG forces once American troops leave Syria, and was assuring the Nato ally that it would have a buffer zone in the region to help

protect its own interests.

Turkey views the YPG as a branch of its own Kurdish separatist movement, and is threatening to launch an offensive against the group, igniting fears of significant civilian casualties.

US commanders planning the troop withdrawal are recommending that YPG fighters battling ISIS be allowed to keep US-supplied weapons, according to American

NATIONAL SECURITY

He told me some things I didn’t know that made me feel a lot better about where we’re headed in Syria... We still have some differences, but I will tell you that the President is thinking long and hard about Syria – how to withdraw our forces but at the same time achieve our national security interests.



SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM, an influential voice on national security policy who sits on the Senate Armed Services Committee, on his meeting with President Donald Trump.

officials. That proposal would likely anger Turkey, where Mr Trump’s national security adviser John Bolton is set to hold talks this week.

Mr Trump decided on the Syria withdrawal in a phone call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, ignoring the advice of top national security aides and without consulting lawmakers or US allies participating in anti-ISIS operations.

The decision prompted Defence Secretary James Mattis to resign. REUTERS, WASHINGTON POST

Iraq hints at bigger anti-ISIS role in Syria after US withdrawal

BAGHDAD • Iraq’s Prime Minister has said that top security officials from Baghdad have met Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, and hinted at a bigger Iraqi role fighting militants from the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) group as US troops withdraw from Syria.

“This issue has a lot of complications,” Mr Adil Abdul-Mahdi told reporters on Sunday, referring to US President Donald Trump’s surprise announcement last month that he

will withdraw American forces from Iraq’s neighbour.

“If any negative development takes place in Syria, it will affect us. We have a 600km border with Syria and Daesh (ISIS) is there,” Mr Abdul-Mahdi said.

The Premier said the Iraqi delegation visited Damascus to “gain the initiative, not just deal with the consequences” of any future ISIS activity emboldened by the US withdrawal. Iraqi news websites said

the visit took place last Saturday.

Mr Abdul-Mahdi said Iraq sought to move beyond its current arrangement with Syria – under which it launches air strikes against ISIS militants in Syrian territory – but did not go into more details.

“There are groups operating in Syria, and Iraq is the best way to deal with this,” he said, responding to a question about the possibility of increased involvement of Iraqi forces in Syria.

Iraqi Shi’ite Muslim paramilitary groups backed by Iran already operate inside Syrian territory against the Sunni Muslim militants of ISIS.

Mr Abdul-Mahdi previously said that about 2,000 ISIS fighters are operating near the border in Syria and trying to cross into Iraq.

ISIS was militarily defeated in Iraq in 2017, but has continued to launch guerilla-style attacks on security forces in the north of the country. REUTERS



Russian children whose mothers are in prison in Iraq for belonging to ISIS about to leave Baghdad International Airport on Sunday for their home country. The children, aged three to 10, were taken to hospital on arrival in Russia for thorough examinations. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Children of Russian ISIS fighters return home from Iraq

MOSCOW • Thirty Russian children whose mothers are in prison in Iraq for belonging to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have arrived in Moscow from Baghdad, the Russian authorities said.

The fathers of the children, aged three to 10, are believed to have been killed in combat during Iraq’s three-year war against the militants, a Russian diplomatic source said before the plane departed on Sunday.

“The plane of the Russian emergency situations ministry has landed,” Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov said on his Telegram account on Sunday, adding that it had

touched down at Moscow’s Zhukovsky airport.

Mr Kadyrov said the children’s arrival was “undeniable proof of the rigorous fulfilment of the mission set out by Russian President Vladimir Putin to save the women and children in Syria and Iraq”.

“If we do not bring them home, they will become the target of the special services of other countries,” he added.

The children were taken to hospital on arrival for “thorough examinations”, the press service of Russia’s health ministry said according to Russia’s Interfax news agency.

Mr Kadyrov posted a video clip of

the children’s departure from Baghdad on popular Russian network VKontakte, adding that 24 of them were from Russia’s Dagestan republic and another three were from Chechnya.

Several thousand Russians travelled to join the ISIS militants in their once sprawling “caliphate” straddling Syria and Iraq, according to estimates from the Russian security services. Some took their families with them.

Since 2017, about 100 women and children, mostly from Russia’s Muslim-majority Caucasus, have returned under a programme championed by Mr Kadyrov.

But in mid-November last year, Chechen activist Kheda Saratova accused Russia’s FSB security service of blocking attempts to bring back the remaining widows and children of Russian ISIS fighters.

“According to our organisation, there are more than 2,000 of them left in Syria and Iraq,” said Mr Saratova, who is on Mr Kadyrov’s human rights council, at the time.

Meanwhile, Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi has held talks in Baghdad with Ms Anna Kuznetsova, the Russian President’s envoy for the rights of children.

During Sunday’s meeting, Mr Ab-

dul-Mahdi said a “distinction should be made between humanitarian issues and terrorist crimes”, according to a statement from his office.

“These children are also victims,” he added.

More than 300 people, including about 100 foreigners, have been sentenced to death and many others to life imprisonment in Iraq for joining ISIS, the extremist group which at its peak controlled nearly a third of the country. Baghdad declared victory against ISIS in December 2017, but the militants maintain sleeper cells and have carried out periodic hit-and-run attacks. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Brexit vote sends more Britons to seek Irish passports

DUBLIN • The number of British citizens applying for Irish passports rose by 22 per cent last year, Ireland’s Foreign Office said yesterday, more than doubling the total number of annual applications since Britain voted to leave the European Union.

Almost 100,000 eligible Britons sought to hang on to their EU citizenship via a passport from their nearest neighbour last year, up from 81,000 in 2017 and 46,000 in 2015, the year before the Brexit vote led to a sharp rise in applications.

Anybody born in the Irish Republic or Northern Ireland, or with an Irish parent or grandparent, is entitled to an Irish passport – a total of about six million British citizens. They are able to hold dual citizenship.

Registrations for Irish passports in Northern Ireland, whose citizens can hold Irish and British passports as the province is part of the United Kingdom, rose by 2 per cent in the year to the end of December.

With three months left until the UK is due to leave the EU on March 29, the draft deal reached between both sides is floundering ahead of a vote in the British Parliament this month, opening up a range of possibilities from a Brexit without a trade deal to calling it off entirely. REUTERS

100k

Number of eligible Britons who sought to hang on to their EU citizenship via a passport from Ireland last year.

46k

Number who did so in 2015, the year before the Brexit vote.

THE STRAITS TIMES

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The Straits Times says

New US Congress, more sparring ahead

On Thursday, when the new Democrat majority is sworn in to the United States House of Representatives, one of its first orders of business will be to place itself at loggerheads with the President. Likely House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has already declared her intention to immediately pass a Bill that would reopen the government, and one that does not include funding for a border wall. The US government had been partially shut down since Dec 21 due to an impasse over wall funding. President Donald Trump has insisted that he will not sign off on any budget that does not include money for the border, and Congress – even the Republican-controlled one – could not whip up enough votes to get such a budget passed.

The shutdown, affecting some 800,000 government workers, was an apt denouement for the deeply polarising past two years on Capitol Hill, and now all eyes will be on how Mr Trump handles the more hostile incoming group of lawmakers. Already both sides have set up positions that offer little room for compromise on the border wall, meaning, if the US government is to fully reopen, there will likely need to be a politically harmful capitulation from one side or the other. An ill-tempered combative start to the new year will likely scupper any remaining hopes that the White House and Congress can have any semblance of a working relationship. For those outside the US watching the worrying state of domestic affairs, the question is also of how the administration will react in terms of foreign policy once it discovers that nearly everything it wants to do domestically has become harder. Two scenarios are possible, based on how previous presidents have dealt with troubles at home. The first is that the House of Representatives becomes such a pre-occupying presence for the President that US foreign policy is effectively neglected; no major shifts in policy emerge, but the US also disengages from key global issues. The second is the complete opposite. Starved of achievements at home and in need of something to show off as the 2020 election cycle starts up, the President turns his attention to finding foreign policy wins.

Some might argue that this has been the preferred strategy of the current administration. For instance, there have been accusations that the recent abrupt decision to withdraw US troops from Syria was triggered by the flood of bad news – from the looming government shutdown to increasing pressure from the special counsel investigation and a tanking stock market. Neither scenario is desirable. Yet it is evidently the reality that countries need to face in the near term. And it is clear that many countries are already reconfiguring alliances and positions to try and limit dependence on the US – regardless of whether it is a distracted, isolated one or one driven by an unpredictable wag-the-dog style foreign policy.

The global threat forecast for 2019

Islamist terror groups continue to dominate the threat landscape, but ultra-nationalist politics also creates new risks.

Rohan Gunaratna

For The Straits Times

The global terrorist and extremist threat is likely to rise this year with the United States retreating from the epicentres of conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq/Syria. President Donald Trump's announcement to withdraw from Syria and draw down from Afghanistan will allow both the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda to rejuvenate.

As of now, ISIS has not been defeated and is in a phase of re-adaptation and global expansion through decentralisation. To survive in Iraq and Syria, the group has established clandestine and underground structures. Moreover, ISIS ideology is still intact and continues to be propagated. In the provinces, groups, networks, cells and personalities that pledged allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi are radicalising Muslims and conducting attacks.

Harnessing both the physical and virtual space, ISIS continues to present an enduring threat worldwide. Although the apex of ISIS leadership and many of the directing figures are on the run and might be eliminated this year, the penultimate leadership enabling the fight and supporting the infrastructure will continue to operate in the shadows as it becomes agile and more cunning.

With the lack of a global counter-terrorism plan and strategy, and the continuance of superpower and geopolitical rivalry, the ISIS- and Al-Qaeda-centric threats will persist and their footprints will grow in and off battlefield arenas.

THREE MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

The global threat landscape this year will be dominated by three major developments.

First, ISIS is entering a new phase of global expansion. With the depletion of its rank and file in Iraq and Syria from about 60,000 to 5,000-6,000 combat fighters, the ISIS territorial control in its main theatre has shrunk to 1 per cent in the east of the Euphrates River.

In any case, outside of the physical "caliphate", the groups, networks, cells and personalities that pledged oaths of allegiance to Baghdadi are growing in their ideological and operational spaces. These local entities are reinforced by the ISIS virtual caliphate and emboldened by the dozens of ISIS affiliates and franchises known as wilayats, or the external provinces of the caliphate.

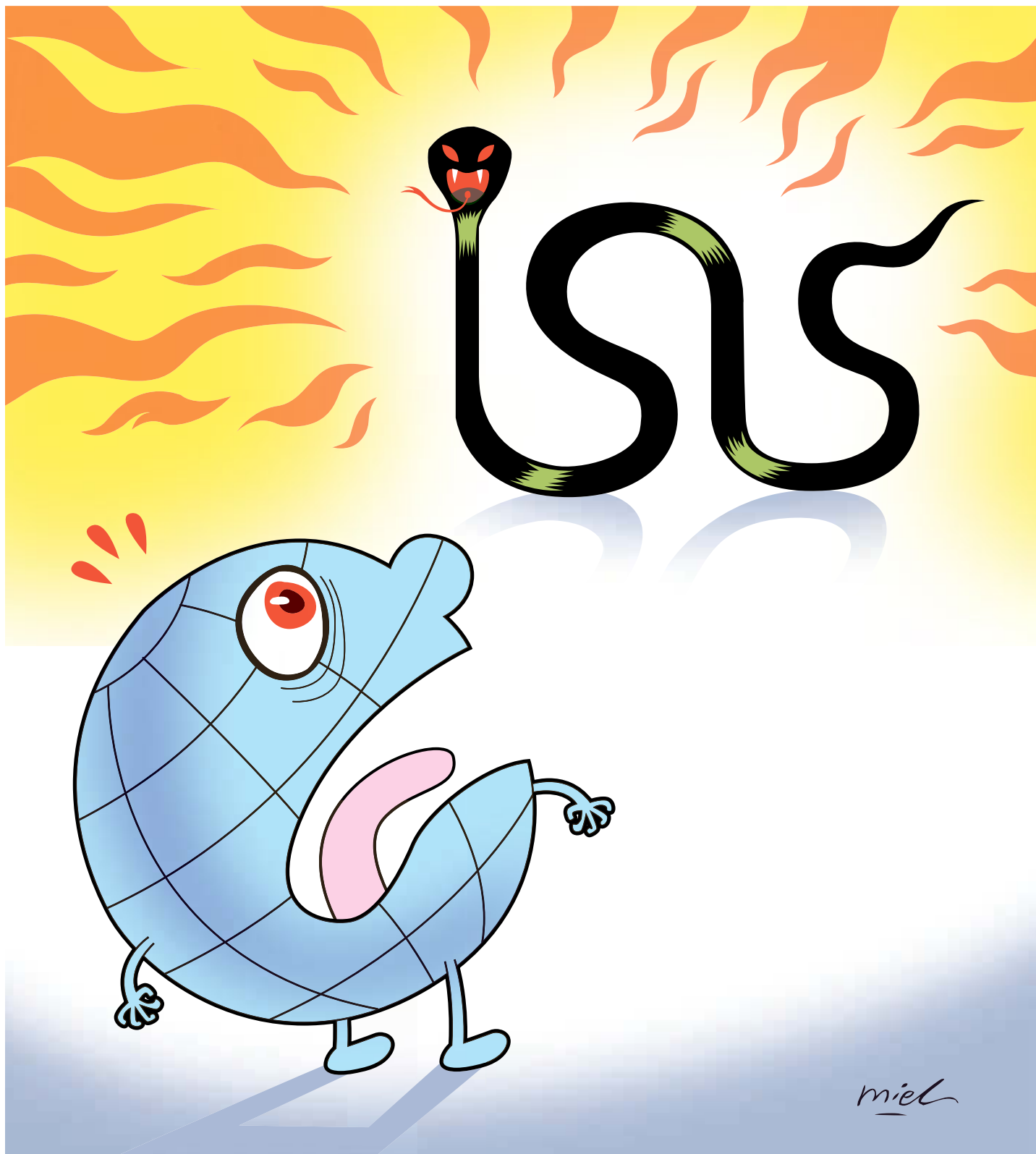
Driving the globalisation of ISIS are its media operations and battle-hardened foreign terrorist fighters returning home armed with Jihadi-Salafist ideology, active combat exposure, expertise in explosive-handling and links with underground networks.

Worldwide government counter-terrorism databases today list about 40,000 ISIS personalities in 102 countries operating in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe and North America. Presenting a pre-eminent threat, ISIS and Al-Qaeda will continue to mount most attacks in the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

Similarly, radicalised personalities and cells of diaspora and migrant communities will strike in North America, Europe and Australasia.

Second, Afghanistan is emerging as an alternative theatre for foreign and local fighters this year. With the disruption of the flow of fighters to Syria and Iraq and the dispersal of fighters from the ISIS core to the periphery, multiple centres of terrorism and extremism are emerging in the Middle East (Yemen, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt), Africa (West Africa, East Africa), Western Balkans, Caucasus and Asia. However, the ISIS theatre is more pronounced in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region with the Islamic State Khorasan (ISK) threatening the Afghan Taleban, the Afghan government and Pakistan.

In addition to the impact on Central Asia, the threat is moving



from tribal Pakistan to mainland Pakistan, Indian-held Kashmir, Xinjiang in western China and Iran. The intermittent terrorist attacks in Indian-held Kashmir, Xinjiang and Iran are likely to continue.

Based on the ongoing geopolitical rivalry, the flow of weapons and finance, and training to the Afghan Taleban and ISK, Afghanistan is turning into a new epicentre of regional, if not global, terrorism.

Between December 2017 and March last year, as many as 69 members of the ISIS core and between 200 and 300 fighters from Iraq and Syria have relocated to Afghanistan, and this trend is likely to continue through this year as well.

Third, with the rise of ultra-nationalism, ideologies have come to the forefront. Communities based on ethnicity and religion are becoming more polarised – therefore making their peripheries vulnerable to hatred and inciting hate in their core.

It is not only the militant jihadists but also political parties, threat groups and personalities driven by extreme interpretations of Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism that threaten their opponents, communities and governments.

The intermittent communal clashes, riots and attacks in India, Myanmar and Sri Lanka

demonstrate how Hinduism and Buddhism have been exploited by religious and political leaders and groups.

Also, Islamophobia continues to rise in the West and even in countries with Muslim majority and minority populations. Similarly, Sunni-Shi'ite relations are further strained, especially with the growing anti-Iran and anti-Shi'ite rhetoric in the Middle East and other parts of the Muslim world.

While conflict between the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen is likely to be mediated this year, it is likely that reciprocal intolerance, exclusivism, extremism and terrorism in both physical and virtual spaces will affect global peace and security. It is, therefore, crucial that world leaders make a concerted effort to unite divided communities.

CONCLUSION

Islamist insurgent and terrorist groups will dominate the threat landscape and mount attacks worldwide both in and off the battlefields.

The geography of the global terrorism map will not change dramatically with Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, India, Libya and the Philippines being the most

violent theatres of conflict, and these countries will likely witness the highest number of terrorist incidents. Due to inter-state rivalries, the threat will persist and even grow.

Similarly, the ultra-nationalistic rhetoric by politicians will polarise communities, making some vulnerable to greater radicalisation and violence.

The centre of gravity of ISIS will be its wilayats and the fragmented cyber caliphate – the ISIS cyberwing re-emerging regionally. Despite government and technology firms working closely with each other, ISIS' virtual presence will endure and grow, compensating for the lack of presence and operations in the physical space.

A decentralised ISIS will present a far greater threat than a centralised ISIS. The group's operatives and supporters will continue to mount attacks and attempt to radicalise Muslim populations worldwide. ISIS will outlive self-anointed caliph Baghdadi, who is likely to be captured, or more likely killed, this year.

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Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong says the Government is focused on people's concerns, and working with citizens to create a better tomorrow for all. He adds that despite the uncertain external environment and economic outlook, Singapore is entering its Bicentennial Year with renewed vigour and purpose. ST FILE PHOTOS

Eventful year for S'pore abroad and at home

This is the text of the New Year message from Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

2018 was a productive year for Singapore. Our economy grew steadily at 3.3 per cent – close to 2017, and above our expectations. We expect to make 1.5–3.5 per cent growth in 2019, but there are major uncertainties in the global economy, with growing trade conflicts, nervous financial markets and signs of slowing growth.

SINGAPORE ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

On the external front, 2018 was eventful. Our diplomats and officials have been busy flying our flag, playing our part on the international stage.

In June, we hosted the historic summit between United States President Donald Trump and Democratic People's Republic of Korea Chairman Kim Jong Un. In 2018, Singapore was also the Asean Chair. Under our chairmanship themes of "Innovation and Resilience", we launched practical initiatives to enhance regional stability and integration. We strengthened cyber-security collaboration, and formed an Asean Smart Cities Network to create a new platform for cooperation with our partners.

But the tide of geopolitics ebbs and flows. Relations between the US and China continue to cause concern. These tensions will cause problems for the world, and make it harder for countries to be friends with both. If countries are forced to choose sides, the open and connected global order will be further divided, hurting one and all.

Closer to home, we are tending relations with our immediate neighbours. Relations with Indonesia have been positive, with significant cooperation and investments flowing in both directions. Malaysia formed a new government following elections in May. We hope to maintain a constructive partnership with Malaysia, and look forward to the new leaders on both sides developing good working relations with one another. Nevertheless, several issues have recently arisen between us, as they will from time to time between two close neighbours tightly bound by history, economics, culture and kinship.

When Malaysia wanted to defer the High Speed Rail project, Singapore worked with them to accommodate their needs. The new disputes on maritime boundaries, following provocative intrusions into our territorial waters, and on airspace, particularly the

Instrument Landing System rules for Seletar Airport, are more difficult to resolve. Malaysia also wants to revise the price of Johor water, an old issue recently revived, on which Singapore's stand is quite clear.

We will deal with all these matters calmly and constructively. Singapore and Malaysia must manage specific problems, however difficult, while preserving the overall relationship. The way to do so is through equality and mutual respect, upholding international commitments and the rule of law.

Older Singaporeans will remember that this is how we dealt with previous rough patches in bilateral relations. Each time we would unite as one people, and stand our ground calmly but firmly. I am confident that this time, too, Singaporeans will work closely together to keep relations with Malaysia stable, and a new generation will learn how to collectively protect our vital interests while living in peace and friendship with our neighbours.

ON OUR DOMESTIC FRONT

Domestically, we are making progress. In many countries, societies are under stress. People are angry and frustrated that wages are stagnating, lives are not improving, and political systems are malfunctioning. The *gilets jaunes* ("yellow vests") protests in France are just the most recent manifestation of this angst. Similar veins of unhappiness have erupted elsewhere, be it Brexit in the United Kingdom, or the drastic loss of support for moderate political leaders in the US and in Germany.

Being a highly open society, Singapore is exposed to similar pressures. But we have coped better than most other countries, because we have worked closely together to improve the lives of all Singaporeans. The economy has grown, unemployment remains low, and incomes have risen across the board. We have created good jobs, and prepared people for them through education and SkillsFuture.

Crucially, the Government is focused on people's concerns, and working with citizens to create a better tomorrow for all.

We are improving healthcare and education, housing and public transport. We are keeping quality healthcare affordable and accessible, and building more polyclinics and hospitals islandwide.

The latest – Sengkang General

and Community Hospitals – started taking patients in August.

Upcoming improvements to the Community Health Assist Scheme and CareShield Life will enhance support to those with chronic conditions and disabilities. And the Merdeka Generation born in the 1950s can look forward to receiving their healthcare benefits package soon, just like the Pioneer Generation before them.

Our education system is already internationally admired, but we will improve it further to help students identify and nurture their strengths and talents. We are reducing the focus on examinations and academic grades, and emphasising holistic development. We are investing heavily in pre-schools, raising the quality of teachers through the new National Institute of Early Childhood Development, and building more pre-school centres to give our young a good start in life. We have also increased pre-school subsidies to lighten the burden on parents bringing up young children.

Physically, we are rebuilding our housing and infrastructure for the next 50 years. HDB is working on programmes – expanded HIP, HIP II and Vers – to upgrade and renew HDB flats and housing estates.

This will ensure that HDB flats continue to be quality homes and a good store of value for retirement. Singaporeans can look forward to living in vibrant and warm neighbourhoods, with a good mix of old and young residents and a strong community spirit. One such project – Kampung Admiralty – was recently named the 2018 World Building of the Year at the World Architecture Festival, a high accolade.

Our hard work on the public transport system is paying off. Bus and train services are less crowded and more reliable. New trains for the Thomson-East Coast MRT Line have been delivered, in time for the opening of TEL Stage 1 in Woodlands in 2019. We are holding public consultations for our long-term land transport master plan for 2040. Meanwhile, work on the Tuas MegaPort and Changi Airport Terminal 5 continues apace; and the Jewel will open in 2019 for all to enjoy.

LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

These are critical investments in our future. To realise these bold plans, Singapore needs steady and capable leaders, who can rally Singaporeans to progress and prosper together.

In 2018, we made significant headway in leadership succession. Parliament reopened in May after a Cabinet reshuffle. The younger political office holders are being



exposed to different responsibilities, and are working together as a team. They have settled on Heng Swee Keat as their leader, and supported Swee Keat's choice of Chan Chun Sing to be his deputy.

This is a good outcome. It gives Singaporeans and foreigners alike confidence that Singapore will be in good hands over the long term, beyond the working lives of me and my senior colleagues. The older ministers and I will do our utmost to help the new team take over the reins from us, and to succeed in their responsibility to lead Singapore and secure its future.

WORKING TOGETHER AS ONE

Singaporeans have a vital part to play in this succession. I ask you to work with the younger political leaders, to form the best team for Singapore.

Our model of governance is quite exceptional, and has served us well. It has enabled Singapore to make the most of what we have and stand out in a highly competitive world.

Singapore politics cannot afford to be riven and destabilised by the rivalries, contestations and factions so often seen elsewhere. Instead Singaporeans must stay united, and work together resolutely to strengthen and renew our social compact.

With long-term policies in place and a strong team in charge, we have reason to be confident about our future. Despite the uncertain external environment and economic outlook, we are entering our Bicentennial Year with renewed vigour and purpose. We are ready to tackle the challenges ahead and make further progress in building a secure, harmonious and prosperous nation.

Happy New Year.

2019 may mark pushback against populists

Dalibor Rohac

A spectre is haunting the Western world – the spectre of populism.

The appeal of divisive political platforms pitting "ordinary people" against self-serving, out-of-touch elites has been on the rise for several decades. The 2008 financial crisis and the chaotic wave of asylum seekers who more recently arrived on Europe's shores accelerated the trend. Yet this year might be the year when the populist revolt starts stalling.

First, the more populists exercise power, the more apparent the costs of populism become. In Britain, the prospect of a chaotic "hard Brexit" has prompted a sense of panic and strong pushback among the Tories, possibly giving a new lease on life to Prime Minister Theresa May's much-reviled withdrawal agreement with the European Union.

And even if Mrs May loses the approaching parliamentary vote on her deal, a second referendum has wider support among British parliamentarians than simply crashing out of the EU.

Even if, for now, the economy seems to be President Donald Trump's forte, his trade wars have not been "good, and easy to win". The steel and aluminium tariffs cost Ford alone about US\$1 billion (\$\$1.36 billion) in profits. According to the National Taxpayers Union Foundation, the overall burden of new tariffs on US consumers exceeds the tax increases from former president Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act.

Recent market gyrations may be a harmless correction to previous exuberance – but they may also reflect the expectations of a coming economic downturn. And, as illustrated by the President's attacks on the chairman of the Federal Reserve and the phone calls from Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin to top bank executives, this administration is singularly ill-equipped to navigate a more turbulent economic environment.

Second, despite recent controversy over the United Nations Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in a handful of European countries, most notably in Belgium, the salience of immigration as an electoral issue is falling.

The growth of the foreign-born population in the United States has slowed in recent years and, partly as a reaction to Mr Trump, popular support for immigration in the US appears to be stronger than it has been in decades, with 75 per cent of Americans saying immigration is a good thing.

British attitudes towards migration have moderated since the Brexit vote.

Even in Germany, where the populist Alternative for Germany party received a major boost during the refugee crisis, the integration of Syrian asylum seekers is proceeding better than most had expected, partly thanks to the country's system of apprenticeships and flexible vocational training. With mainstream politicians proving willing and able to control immigration inflows, the scope for orchestrating a populist revolt against "open borders" is shrinking.

Third, in contrast to conventional wisdom, populists are just not very good at commanding popular majorities. Prime Minister Viktor Orban's Fidesz received more than 50 per cent of the popular vote in Hungary only once, in 2010. Its recent parliamentary supermajorities are as much a result of an electoral system tailored to the party's needs.

Similarly, the appeal of Mr Trump – who famously lost the popular vote to Mrs Hillary Clinton – beyond a narrow, overwhelmingly white, male and rural America is extremely limited. That, of course, bodes extremely ill for the future of a Trumpified Republican Party.

President Emmanuel Macron, in turn, soundly defeated his populist adversaries in the French election two years ago. If his support has tanked since, mainly due to the unpopular reforms he has adopted, a replay of the 2017 election in opinion polls would not actually produce a dramatically different outcome, other than an initial redistribution of votes from the far left to the far right in the first round.

Perhaps the pendulum will also start swinging back in the East. Notwithstanding the cold weather and the holiday season, Hungary has lately experienced large protests against a range of government policies. In this year's election in Poland, the Law and Justice Party is unlikely to sustain its current parliamentary majority. In Greece, which is also due to elect a new Parliament this year, the reformist centre-right New Democracy is firmly leading in the polls.

None of this is to suggest that politics on both sides of the Atlantic is about to return to its post-war baseline. The new divides exploited by populists – between urban and rural voters, and visions of an open versus closed society – will define democratic politics for years to come.

The populist right and the populist left are bound to make significant gains in the elections to the European Parliament in May this year, and in the US, Mr Trump's bigotry has helped to energise the socialist and identity-politics-driven wing of the Democratic Party.

However, with US party affiliation down relative to the 2000s, it is not a stretch to imagine that a radical, hyperpolarised politics does not really speak to "silent majorities" in the US or Europe. The challenge of this year will consist of giving those voters a voice and a compelling policy agenda that will reinvigorate and strengthen our democracies.

WASHINGTON POST

• Dalibor Rohac is a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington.

AI competition is the new space race

Leonid Bershidsky

It's been another year of relentless artificial-intelligence hype and incremental AI achievement. Machines still beat humans only in carefully constructed environments or at narrow tasks.

The good news is that, as the technology progresses, the race for leadership is still wide open, and even Europe, where politicians fret that the continent is lagging behind China and the United States, is still quite competitive.

According to the Artificial Intelligence Index 2018 annual report, whose steering committee includes leading AI scholars such as Professor Yoav Shoham of Stanford University and Professor Erik Brynjolfsson of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, AI has progressed on all the measures tracked.

Some of the metrics, from the number of published papers and conference attendance, to mentions on corporate earnings calls and in parliamentary hearings, measure the hype. Others reflect improving performance.

Last year, AI became more accurate and much faster at image detection. It's also improved at parsing the grammatical structure of sentences, answering

multiple-choice questions and translation. Whether this brings us closer to truly superhuman AI is a different matter.

On the translation front, a measure called Bilingual Evaluation Understudy is used to determine accuracy. It compares machine-translated sentences to those rendered by human experts, and last year, almost half the machine translations between English and German news articles measured up to the human ones.

Last year, Microsoft announced with much fanfare that its AI did just as well as humans in translating news from Chinese into English. But the underlying paper reports much lower scores for the Chinese translations than for the separately published German ones, and accuracy scores from human evaluators of between 50 per cent and 70 per cent.

Machine-translation algorithms still produce plenty of gibberish and are really mostly useful, in a limited way, to humans with some understanding of both languages and the context.

Improved image-recognition has worked wonders in some fields of medicine. For example, Google has developed a system for grading prostate cancer that does it more accurately than US pathologists, and a Stanford team has achieved similar success with skin cancer.

If, in previous years, some AI scholars grumbled that the hype might impede progress because people would become disappointed in the unfulfilled promise of a shiny toy, attention to AI has become too sustained, and the financial and intellectual resources thrown at it too enormous for that to happen. Now, competing in AI is a matter of prestige for major nations.

Where lots of data exist and precision is valued, AI can help humans make better decisions, even though it still messes up regularly when trained on biased data sets or is intentionally tricked. Humans are less prone to misidentifying objects and are better able to correct for their biases.

Data-mining and question-answering skills can make AI appear almost human at times. Last year, IBM presented the

current iteration of its Project Debater, which tries to debate humans hewing to the rules of such competitions. The exercise looks impressive – the machine instantaneously gathers and orders information, packs it into grammatically correct sentences and inserts pre-written jokes almost in the correct places.

But, as an AI expert who was present discovered, it tended merely to repeat its points in response to arguments. While the idea of having a machine, with its superhuman ability to analyse data, take part in brainstorming is exciting, “we are most certainly not on the verge of seeing AI systems out-debating their human counterparts”, wrote the expert, Professor Chris Reed of the University of Dundee in Scotland. “Today’s AI technology is as far from these scenarios as the Romans’ experiments with steam power were from the Industrial Revolution,” he concluded.

As often happens with technological advancement, AI gets too much attention too early. But if, in previous years, some AI scholars grumbled that the hype might impede progress because people would become disappointed in the unfulfilled promise of a shiny toy, attention to AI has become too sustained, and the financial and intellectual resources thrown at it too enormous for that to happen. Now, competing in AI is a matter of prestige for major nations.

So far, the US, Europe and China all have their strengths. Data in the Artificial Intelligence Index report shows the US as the runaway leader in patents; along with China, it leads in the number of papers submitted to and accepted by major AI conferences. But it is in Europe where the greatest number of AI papers (28 per cent of the total, compared with 25 per cent for China and 17 per cent for the US) are published. A report published by the

European Commission’s Joint Research Centre last month says the European Union is home to a quarter of the approximately 35,000 entities working in AI today, compared with 28 per cent for the US and 23 per cent for China.

According to McKinsey & Co, Europe also matches competitors when it comes to AI adoption in business, especially in process automation.

This is likely to come as a surprise to European leaders, especially German and French ones, who often talk about falling behind. Last month, German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier supported the idea of a pan-European, state-led corporation, along the lines of Airbus, to compete in AI.

Europe doesn’t really need massive state interference to catch up, as it did in the 1960s and 1970s when Boeing dominated the aircraft industry. But the EU and governments in North America and China will be pouring more resources into AI in the coming years, and distinct development models are likely to crystallise in the key competing countries as regulation follows the money.

The Joint Research Centre report names three approaches that are easy to match to their regions of origin – “AI for profit”, “AI for control” and “AI for society” – a discipline it defines as “a human-centred, ethical and secure approach”. Regardless of how well the technology will eventually work, major nations have already co-opted it for soft power and ideological competition. It’s a rerun of last century’s space race, not seen in this pure a form for many decades.

WASHINGTON POST

• Leonid Bershidsky is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering European politics and business. He was the founding editor of Russian business daily Vedomosti and founded opinion website Slon.ru.

China thwarts US effort to promote American culture on campuses

Jane Perlez and Luz Ding

BEIJING • The US Ambassador to China, Mr Terry Branstad, wanted to make what in most nations would have been a routine trip.

One of his favourite schools, Iowa State University, had opened a centre to promote American culture in an inland Chinese province, and the laid-back former governor of Iowa was eager to take questions from Chinese students.

The centre’s programme, largely financed by the State Department, was deliberately benign so as not to offend Chinese government sensibilities. Politics was off the agenda. English lessons focused on fashion, music and sports. An essay-writing contest was called Bald Eagle & Panda after well-known fauna in both countries.

But Henan Normal University, a campus set on the Yellow River with a prominent statue of Mao Zedong out front, denied Mr Branstad permission to visit the centre in the autumn – and offered no explanation.

The rebuff underscored how the United States and China compete not only in trade and technology, but also over the values and beliefs that define their societies, an echo of the Cold War with the Soviet Union.

In China, such programmes provided a window into American culture outside the filter of the Communist Party, and their unwinding could deepen the divide between the societies of the world’s two largest economies.

The centre that turned down Mr Branstad was one of more than 20 that the State Department opened in the past decade on college campuses across China to promote American culture and counter anti-American propaganda by offering English lessons, screening movies and hosting visiting music and dance performances.

Today, the American centres have closed after the Chinese authorities denied US officials entry to them and state security agents interrogated an American academic working on a Chinese campus.

“It became clear after a while that the centres were no longer an asset to the Americans and became a terrible liability,” said Dr Jennifer Tarlin of the University of North Dakota, director of an American centre at a Shanghai university from 2011 until last summer.

The programme’s start coincided with a rise in nationalist sentiment in China. Shortly after he came into power six years ago, President Xi Jinping rolled out a campaign



against Western values, investing Communist Party members in academia with the power to redline even the most innocuous and apolitical expressions of American culture. And funding American culture in China became particularly unpopular in Washington as the Trump administration worked to distance the countries and anger built over Beijing’s propaganda in the US.

When the American centres opened a decade ago, they bucked a trend. Promoting American culture abroad, once a high point of US foreign policy, was considered obsolete, an idea that was dispensed with after the Cold War.

In the early 1990s, conservative Republicans and Clinton Democrats worked together to demolish the US Information Agency and slash the budgets of culture programmes abroad. Democracy had prevailed, but the Internet rendered cultural diplomacy unnecessary.

But China was a special case. The US government was concerned about negative depictions of the US in China’s tightly controlled state media.

On American campuses, the

Chinese government was subsidising a network of Confucius Institutes, where Beijing appoints teachers and dictates the curriculum. It grew from around 70 outposts during the Obama administration to more than 100 today.

In 2011, only five roughly equivalent American places existed in China – at US embassies or consulates, sites that are closely watched by Chinese security and forbidding for local residents to enter.

The Obama administration felt compelled to act.

By 2012, the State Department had made individual grants of US\$100,000 (S\$136,000) to more than two dozen American universities to open centres on Chinese campuses. To distance itself, it urged the centres to seek extra funds from private American sources and stayed away from decisions about programming.

Dr William Brustein, then vice-provost for international affairs at Ohio State University, recalled meeting US ambassador Jon Huntsman Jr in Beijing in 2011. The ambassador told him about the State Department’s new venture. “They’re like the Confucius

Institutes – this is America’s answer,” Dr Brustein recounted the ambassador saying. “You should open a centre – try to pick a place that is not Beijing or Shanghai.”

Ohio State prided itself on its already large number of fee-paying Chinese students, and the university thought the centre would attract more. Many students came from Hubei province, so it was easy for Dr Brustein to persuade Wuhan University, a major university there, to agree to host a place that would showcase American themes.

The centre opened in 2012 in a loft-like space with a kitchen and English-language cookbooks, and was led by an English teacher at Ohio State, Mr Bob Eckhart, who brought jazz groups and dance ensembles over for performances.

The most successful gig was a group of African-American step dancers, Mr Eckhart said. “We stressed that we were presenting authentic American culture and that we were not just cheerleaders for America.” Other centres opened at campuses across China.

Often the programming was quirky. At the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Dr Tarlin invited American musicians who played

Depression-era folk. She staged a workshop production of the opera Scarlet Letter with a libretto by feminist writer Carol Gilligan.

It wasn’t long before the centres ran afoul of the orthodoxy of Mr Xi and his campaign against liberal democracy.

Strict edicts announced by Education Minister Yuan Guiren in early 2015 signalled the official disfavour. Books highlighting Western values had no place in the classroom; Chinese universities must ensure that Mr Xi’s ideology was front and centre, Mr Yuan said.

Suddenly, university officials barred American cultural groups and speakers. The Chinese homed in on the ties with the State Department, suspicious that the US was using the centres as a cover for spreading democratic ideas, former and current diplomats said.

In Nanjing, Chinese state security officials summoned a dean of the New York Institute of Technology, Dr Monique Taylor, in 2015 for questioning for several hours.

Dr Taylor was responsible for the American centre sponsored by the institute at the Nanjing University of Posts and Telecommunications; she was also in charge of a separate academic programme with faculty

from New York City on the Nanjing campus.

The interrogation rattled the American university, according to three people familiar with the episode. A spokesman for the university declined to comment.

After the episode, the university declined a new State Department grant and deleted the word American from the centre’s name. It was renamed Campus Commons.

A State Department inspector general’s appraisal of the embassy in Beijing in 2017 described how the Chinese government called American public affairs diplomats “hostile foreign forces”. The report said that from January 2016 to April 2017, there were 153 instances of Chinese thwarting the work of the American public affairs officials, including with the centres.

In the 2000s, as the Confucius Institutes flourished in the US, those who wanted to promote American soft power eventually prevailed with the opening of the centres in China. But American diplomats responsible for culture could never get the centres to take off: In Washington, the economic relationship was considered far more important, former diplomats said.

Then Secretary of State John Kerry took up the cause of the centres with Ms Liu Yandong, who was a vice-premier until last year and China’s top culture czar.

The Chinese dismissed Mr Kerry’s complaints, said Mr Richard Stengel, who was undersecretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs then.

“In my experience, the Chinese project, rationalise and then minimise,” Mr Stengel said, explaining that senior Chinese officials denied any problems. “They first say, ‘You do it, too.’ Then they say: ‘It’s not my responsibility.’ And finally, ‘It doesn’t matter much anyway.’”

In all, the State Department spent US\$5.1 million on 29 centres, though about 10 of them never opened. The inspector general’s report concluded that the effort had been “largely ineffective”. The State Department said it had stopped funding all of the centres.

Mr Branstad was not the first US envoy to run into trouble over one of them.

Mr Kerry complained to the Chinese Ambassador to Washington, Mr Cui Tiankai, that the US ambassador at the time, Mr Max Baucus, had also been prevented from travelling to one.

According to Mr Stengel, who was in the conversation, Mr Kerry turned to Mr Cui and asked: “Have we ever limited where you can go?”

Mr Cui replied: “Not yet.” NYTIMES

BIG PICTURE



WEATHER

Windy, with passing showers in the afternoon.
High 34 deg C Low 24 deg C
24-hr PSI as of 5pm yesterday: 29 to 42 (Good)



PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Suspense in the air ahead of new year

Aerial dancers belonging to the Kitonb theatre group hung from a crane as they performed during a rehearsal of their Carillon, The Flight of Time show on Sunday.

The show, which features spectacular choreography and acrobatic mid-air performances accompanied by special effects and music, was performed at the La Festa di Roma New Year's celebration at the Circus Maximus in Rome.

Kitonb also performed their Ode To The Moon, a tribute to mark the 50th anniversary of the moon landing.

In addition to the traditional fireworks at midnight, the Circus Maximus played host to concerts by singer Vinicio Capossela and the Piccola Orchestra di Tor Pignattara.



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BUSINESS



JEROME POWELL
BUMPY FIRST YEAR
FOR U.S. FED
CHAIRMAN C2

When SMEs team up to thrive, expand overseas

Enterprise Singapore starts at least 22 group projects that help over 100 small firms upgrade

Sue-Ann Tan

While it can be a dog-eat-dog world in business, a group of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have decided to work together for mutual benefit, instead of competing over the same turf.

They are part of an Enterprise Singapore initiative which is bringing SMEs together to succeed collectively in targeted projects driven by

11 SME Centres here.

These centres provide advice on business upgrading, among other things.

Announced two years ago, the Group-based Upgrading initiative has resulted in at least 22 projects, which include digital solutions for businesses.

For example, after banding together and working with technology firms, several pest companies here have now incorporated sensors in their traps. This allows them to efficiently monitor multiple traps.

The initiative has seen over 100 participating businesses record improved sales and revenue, productivity, customer service levels and shopping experiences.

Business owners approached by The Straits Times say that by collaborating, they have shared ideas and driven down the costs of expensive problem-solving new technologies.

"The traditional and entrenched mindset of most SMEs is to usually compete with one another in order to survive," said Mr Feroz Mak, founder of halal eatery Mak's Place – The Hawkerant.

"With globalisation, a firm cannot be the know-all. SME owners should be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, and tap one another's strengths, within a defined set of rules.

"And they should work vigorously towards common objectives for mutual benefit."

For instance, he said, Mak's Place can produce its own brand of ready-to-cook mixes because of its domain knowledge and product know-how.

But to enter a new market in a different country, it has to collaborate with another company, including rivals, because the company may have established links there.

"Coming together to leverage one another's strengths and expertise is far less tedious than trying to lengthen our own learning curve," Mr Mak added.

His company participated in a project which is helping companies here to take their halal food into the market in China. The project was led by the SME Centre@Singapore

Malay Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Mr Raymond Tan, executive director of noodle manufacturer Tan Seng Kee Foods, said: "Collaborating with other SMEs brings us greater economies of scale, in that we can leverage one another's distribution channels to gain a competitive advantage over imports from other competing countries.

"The knowledge sharing is also an advantage as the Chinese market is complex and difficult to navigate, particularly in getting customs clearance."

Besides food companies, pest control firms and even tailors have collaborated on projects.

Ms Nicole Zycinski-Singh, managing director of Killem Pest, said by working together, companies can come up with solutions specific to the Singapore market. "There is a focus on what will work in the urban, densely populated and high-rise building setting.

"Openly collaborating and sharing information also means that the industry as a whole can work together to improve and in the case of pest management, become more professional, so it helps the image of the industry."

suetan@sph.com.sg

A good fit with shared scanner

Tailor Sandra Faustina Lee used to take six minutes on average with a tape measure to get the fitting right for each customer.

She often has to make dozens of costumes for dancers so the whole process can be time-consuming for the 27-year-old owner of Free Movement in Ubi Road.

Now, thanks to a project she collaborated on with other tailors in Singapore, Ms Lee has a 3D body scanner from Taiwan which cuts the measuring time per customer to just a few seconds.

The scanner is the result of a project under Enterprise Singapore's Group-based Upgrading (GBU) initiative, driven by SME Centre@Association of Small and Medium Enterprises.

By working together, the four tailors, including Ms Lee, were able to drive down the cost of the 2m-tall scanner, which has sensors in its frame to capture a 3D image of a customer's body.

The scanner is linked to a phone app and the measurements are sent to the tailor's phone with the 3D image, which can be spun around so the tailor can see the customer from all angles.

Ms Lee said: "The scanner helps us to be more precise. People have different characteristics, such as sloping shoulders, and we can tweak the clothes accordingly.

"It also saves time. Sometimes I have a group of 50 or 60 dancers and I cannot take all their measurements manually."

Ms Lee makes costumes for performers but she also takes requests for dresses and wedding gowns.

Ms Lyn Chan, co-founder of mobile tailor service A Gentleman's Tale, has bigger plans for the scanner.

"This year, we will be launching our Walk-in Mobile Tailoring Showroom where we have customised the interior of a Mercedes Sprinter van to fit the 3D scanner, incorporating the feel of a retail space within a van," Ms Chan said.

She added that the scanner is easy to use, so staff will not need to go through months of apprenticeship to learn how to take measurements accurately.

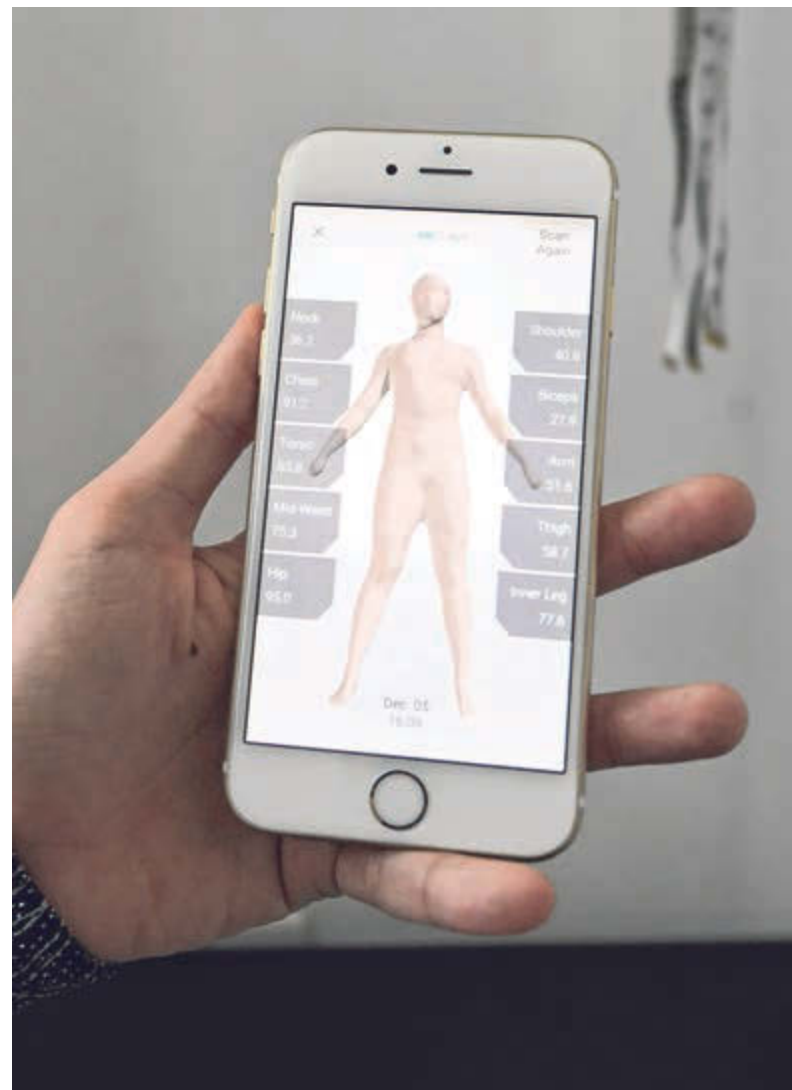
Using the scanner also saves "customers the need to stand still for 10 to 12 minutes", she said.

Sue-Ann Tan

SCAN TO WATCH
How the 3D body scanner works
<http://str.sg/bodyscanner>



Tailor Sandra Faustina Lee, who makes costumes for performers and also takes requests to make dresses and wedding gowns, said the 3D scanner has cut the time taken to measure a customer from six minutes to just a few seconds. The measurements are also more precise. ST PHOTOS: ALPHONSUS CHERN



(Left) The 2m-tall scanner from Taiwan has sensors in its frame to capture a 3D image of a customer's body. (Right) The scanner is linked to a phone app and the measurements are sent to the tailor's phone with the 3D image, which can be spun around so the tailor can see the customer from all angles.

Banding digitally to battle pests

To wage an effective war against the pests that creep around Singapore's urban jungle, pest control companies are banding together to use a smart rodent system.

The digital system allows operators to monitor multiple trap sites, record data around the clock and store the information online for easy access through mobile devices.

This takes away the need for constant checking of traps to see if pests have been caught.

About 10 pest control companies are using the system, which has saved time and manpower costs. The firms can now also retrieve records instantly and plan better rodent control strategies from the data collected.

Mr Allan Heng, general manager of pest control product supplier Bentz Jaz Singapore, said: "The manual records of pest control operations are prone to be inaccurate, often delayed and show difficulty in tracking (the pests).

"The Internet of Things computerised system will have all records kept in servers, accessible through computers and mobile device any time. Rodent control requires immediate attention and monitoring for any sign of rodent infestation before the problem becomes too serious and too late to eradicate."

He said, by working together, firms have been able to troubleshoot the digital solutions and share knowledge with other collaborators.

Mr Bernard Chan, general manager of Eficaz Pest Management, said the traps come with a motion sensor camera as well as infrared technology. He added that technology is the way forward for the labour-intensive industry.

Ms Nicole Zycinski-Singh, managing director of Killem Pest, said: "Technology can definitely help us be more efficient and change the public perception of the industry. It is more than just spraying or fogging. Technology will show the investigatory, problem-solving and reporting nature of our work."

Her company uses an electronic rodent monitoring trap, which offers rodent surveillance and immediate notification when a rodent is caught. "Previously, we would require an additional one or two people to carry out weekly inspections. Now, we can halve the manpower and there is no need for our pest control operators to check all the traps each week," she said.

Sue-Ann Tan

SEE BUSINESS C2

Japanese yen the biggest winner against greenback

Among major units, it outperformed sterling, euro, Canadian dollar

5%

How much the yen's share of global reserves rose to in the third quarter, the highest in 16 years.

NEW YORK • The Japanese yen was set to end 2018 as the biggest winner against the US dollar among major currencies, after benefiting as investors sought out safety amid the year's uncertainties.

The yen outperformed as the British pound and euro faced headwinds from Brexit and Italy's budget crisis, while the US-China trade war and plunging oil prices pressured commodity-related peers such as the Canadian dollar.

The yen was up about 2 per cent on the year in Asian trading yesterday, to 110.45 per dollar. Meanwhile, the Japanese currency's share of global reserves rose to 5 per cent in the third quarter, the highest in 16 years.

If headwinds keep blowing in

2019, the yen could "win by default" to tack a fourth year on its streak of annual gains against the dollar, said Mr Shahab Jalinoos, head of forex trading strategy at Credit Suisse Group.

"News in Japan has been less negative than it has been in some other places, at least relative to original expectations, over the course of 2018," Mr Jalinoos said in a telephone interview. "And that allowed the yen to play the role of a safe asset of sorts within the framework of a generally negative year for risky assets."

The yen rose amid greenback weakness early last year, but gave back those gains after the dollar turned things around in April. After touching its weakest level of the

year against the greenback in October, the yen advanced last month amid volatility in equity markets.

In the absence of factors that could inspire investor confidence in risky assets and global growth this year, Mr Jalinoos expects the yen to remain a favourite. The average forecast from a Bloomberg survey sees the yen strengthening to around 109 per dollar by end-2019.

Mr Marvin Barth of Barclays, however, said the Japanese currency could gain even more – to 107 yen per buck by end-2019. The yen advance this year will come as investors find themselves concentrated in US dollar risk and look for sources of diversification in the Japanese currency, he said.

"The yen is quite undervalued from a long-run historical perspective," the Barclays head of foreign exchange and emerging market macro strategy research said in a telephone interview. The forecast is "not a huge appreciation in the yen, but it is outperforming other currencies".

IG Asia's Singapore-based market strategist Jingyi Pan echoes forecasts for a stronger yen this year, saying: "With the array of worries including the uncertainty over the growth outlook expected to prolong, the haven trade may well be kept in favour."

"The eventual pause for the current Fed hike cycle could see yield differentials aiding the yen on its next leg up, something that had been absent in the past two years."

BLOOMBERG

News analysis

Fed chair Powell's unscripted approach sets up for rocky 2019

WASHINGTON • Mr Jerome Powell had a bumpy first year as Federal Reserve chairman when it came to talking about policy, by turns spooking and comforting investors, even as economic data offered increasingly mixed signals and United States President Donald Trump stepped up his attacks on the US central bank.

And as 2018 closes out with a dramatic slump in stocks and a drop in bond yields, financial markets will need to brace themselves for this year, when Mr Powell is scheduled to make more unscripted public remarks than any Fed chief in history.

A lawyer and former investment banker whose long career in markets and government gave him the real-world perspective Mr Trump sought in a Fed chair, Mr Powell took office last February, determined to improve the Fed's communications with Congress and the public.

He meets frequently with legislators and speaks about policy in a style that is less economics textbook and more folksy than past Fed chiefs, who in recent decades have all been economists.

That style may have been part of his appeal to Mr Trump, but it has arguably contributed to market volatility as investors hang on Mr Powell's every word for clarity on how much further the Fed may raise rates.

"I have people in my building who are just furious about this," said Mr Carl Tannenbaum, chief economist at Northern Trust, referencing Mr Powell's recent description of the Fed's current situation as walking through a dark room.

Though the metaphor was meant to show Mr Powell's appreciation of the uncertainty the central bank faces and a reason for caution, Mr Tannenbaum said it left investors in the lurch. "The problem is, the Fed can't just sit there in the dark. The Fed has to make an effort to shed light on what's going on."

Mr Powell has continued to advertise the Fed's "uncertainty", using the word four times at his Dec 19 news conference, following the Fed's rate hike at its last policy meeting of 2018.

But with Mr Powell sending one set of messages in his remarks – that risks are mounting and rate hikes may need to go slower – while still producing Fed forecasts that show rates continuing to rise this year, "the message in here is a little bit sloppy", said University of Oregon economics professor Tim Duy.

Crystal clear guidance, meanwhile, has its own drawbacks.

At the December news conference, Mr Powell said definitively that the Fed's balance sheet downsizing was on "automatic pilot" and he did not anticipate any changes.

Though the remarks were consistent with past Fed guidance, stocks sank on disappointment

that he did not indicate more flexibility.

Several days later, New York Fed president John Williams, a close ally of Mr Powell and a permanent voter on the Fed's policy-setting committee, conveyed a softer approach. Stocks rose.

All Fed chairs have stumbled – and roiled markets across the globe as a result. In 2013, Mr Ben Bernanke sent world stocks plummeting when he suggested the Fed would slow its bond-buying stimulus.

Back in 1996, Mr Alan Greenspan tried to deflate stocks by noting "irrational exuberance" in asset values, though the effect was short-lived.

But past Fed chairs have never operated under the current level of open scrutiny from the White House, with Mr Trump's own commentary roiling markets as well.

Complicating matters further, weaker global growth may threaten what have been powerful gains in the US job market and strong domestic growth.

Add to that a trade war with China and a shutdown of parts of the US federal government over a budget impasse, and the result is a potent blend of uncertainties that have markets betting the Fed will not raise rates even once next year.

It is against this background that starting this month, Mr Powell will hold a news conference after every Fed meeting to provide more clarity about Fed actions and thinking, as he explained when he announced the change last June.

The change will mean that he will hold eight news conferences this year, up from the current practice of four per year.

But the change also increases the odds of a stray market-ranking remark.

It might be a good time to say even more forcefully that the Fed does not have all the answers, said former Fed vice-chair Alice Rivlin.

"That's always difficult," she said, recounting Mr Greenspan's reaction when she used the word "guess" in a speech. "(He) said, don't use the word 'guess' because it sounds like we don't know what we're doing. And I thought well, okay – but we don't." REUTERS



Mr Jerome Powell speaks about policy in a style that is less economics textbook than past Fed chiefs. PHOTO: REUTERS



Chinese customers sampling a range of halal food from different Singapore brands at an exhibition in Chengdu last March. PHOTO: SME CENTRE@SMCCI

SMEs teaming up

Joining hands to take SG halal food to China

Last March, a group of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the halal food and beverage sector teamed up for an exhibition in Chengdu, to gather information on the market.

Led by the SME Centre@Singapore Malay Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SMCCI), the group was there to explore the halal market in China and see if Singapore's halal food products could be marketed there.

Around 10 companies joined the initiative, which was led by business advisers. The companies gained first-hand knowledge and established contacts to develop potential collaborations and distribution channels for their products.

The advisers from the SME Cen-

tre@SMCCI helped these companies to ensure the packaging, labelling and shelf-life of their products complied with the multi-layered food regulatory system in China.

Ms Wahida Wahid, director of Hararu Izakaya, a halal charcoal-grill restaurant here, said: "The demand for halal products is on the rise, not only in China but elsewhere too, such as Japan."

"We took up this offer to introduce our products and our brand. It was an eye-opener and with the SME Centre's guidance and connections, it was much easier to learn about the market in China."

Mr Raymond Tan, executive director of Tan Seng Kee Foods, which produces halal-certified noo-

dles, said: "We believe that banding together to target overseas markets will benefit the entire industry as there is power in numbers."

"Collectively, we can bring a bigger basket of tasty Singapore brands to Chinese consumers and educate them on our multicultural food heritage."

He added that through the initiative, his company is able to directly export and stock its noodles in supermarket chains in Chengdu.

Mr Feroz Mak, founder of eatery Mak's Place – The Hawkerant, which serves halal Chinese and Western fare, said: "Without networking support, companies attempting market entry alone will have to conduct their own market

research, which could be potentially time-consuming and costly."

His company has been working with another SME that has established business connections in China.

He added: "Having a business presence in China over time has enabled them to put in place a strong retail infrastructure."

"They have acquired knowledge of the market there and have provided us with important pointers on demographics, location, price points, licensing procedures, market entry documentation and local trends."

"They are currently assisting us with market entry."

Sue-Ann Tan

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Oil set for biggest 3-month fall since 2014

38% plunge in prices last quarter drags down market as trade war and economic concerns linger

SEOUL • Oil is set for its biggest quarterly drop since 2014, marking the end of a turbulent 2018 during which prices tumbled into a bear market only weeks after reaching a four-year high.

A 38 per cent plunge last quarter is dragging futures in New York to their first annual loss since 2015, with a volatility gauge soaring 100 per cent over the past three months.

Investors are unsure if output cuts pledged by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies will be able to counter booming American production.

Meanwhile, a trade dispute between the US and China as well as the Federal Reserve's monetary policy are stoking concerns over economic growth.

While a US plan to reimpose sanctions on Iranian oil drove prices to a four-year high in October, the Donald Trump administration's surprise decision to grant waivers from its restrictions to some nations sparked a collapse in crude.

As Opec and its partners, including Russia, prepare to cut 1.2 million barrels a day of output from this month to stabilise the market, they face a challenge from American drillers who are pumping at record levels.

"Trump has reigned as the ultimate controller of oil prices this year because everything from sanctions against Iran, the trade war with China and even tensions with Saudi Arabia, he's been involved," commodities analyst Sungchil Will Yun at HI Investment & Futures Corp said by phone. "While prices won't fall further from here, the pace of increase will also be quite gradual next year."

West Texas Intermediate (WTI) for February was at US\$45.84 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange, up 51 cents, at 12.26 pm yesterday in Singapore. Prices are on track for a 24 per cent decline this year after climbing more than 60 per cent in the previous two years. Total volume traded was about 9 per cent below the 100-day average.

Brent for March settlement added 12 cents to US\$53.33 a barrel on the London-based ICE Futures Europe exchange. The February contract expired last Friday after closing 4 cents higher at US\$52.20.

The global benchmark crude has lost 35.5 per cent last quarter, and is headed for a 20 per cent annual drop. It traded at a premium of US\$7.67 to March WTI.

Also in recent weeks, signs of slowing consumption, higher interest rates by the US Fed, political turmoil in Washington and uncertainty over America's trade spat with China have spurred a flight from risk assets including oil and equities. BLOOMBERG

Euro still needs work 20 years on, say European Union's presidents

The five presidents of the European Union (EU) used the euro's 20th birthday to praise the single currency's successes, while warning that the job isn't yet complete. The continent's monetary union, one of the biggest economic experiments of the modern era, has grown to 19 members from its initial 11 and now covers 340 million citizens. But the shackling together of nations as diverse as Germany, Italy and Greece also created strains that led to a debt crisis and which continue to fuel political flare-ups. Here are some comments from the EU's political and monetary heads for the Jan 1 anniversary, as compiled by Bloomberg.



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MARIO DRAGHI, president of the European Central Bank.



CONTINUE TO BOOST EURO'S GLOBAL ROLE

The euro has become a symbol of unity, sovereignty and stability. It has delivered prosperity and protection to our citizens and we must ensure that it continues to do so. This is why we are working hard to complete our Economic and Monetary Union and boost the euro's international role further.



JEAN-CLAUDE JUNKER, president of the European Commission.



PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BE PREPARED FOR WHAT THE FUTURE MAY HOLD

The euro and the close economic cooperation that it entails has evolved over time, overcoming challenges in its way. It has come a long way since the start, and it has seen important changes in the wake of the crisis to help us leave the hardship behind.

But this work is not yet finished, it requires continuous reform efforts in good times as in bad times. There can be no doubts of our political will to strengthen the Economic and Monetary Union. We need to be prepared for what the future may hold – we owe that to our citizens.



MARIO CENTENO, president of the Eurogroup.

Foxconn may start assembling top-end iPhones in India

MUMBAI/DELHI • Apple will begin assembling its top-end iPhones in India through the local unit of Foxconn as early as this year, the first time the Taiwanese contract manufacturer will have made the product in the country, according to a source familiar with the matter.

Foxconn will be assembling the most expensive models, such as devices in the flagship iPhone X family, the source said, potentially taking Apple's business in India to a new level.

The work will take place at Foxconn's plant in Sriperumbudur town in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, said the source, who is not authorised to speak to the media and declined to be named.

Foxconn, which already makes phones for Xiaomi in India, will invest 25 billion Indian rupees (\$488 million) to expand the plant, including investment in iPhone production, Tamil Nadu's Industries Minister M. C. Sampath said.

The investment may create as many as 25,000 jobs, he added.

Another source said Foxconn planned to assemble iPhones in India, in a move that could help both the manufacturer and Apple to limit the impact of a trade war between the United States and China.

The Hindu newspaper first reported last week that the Foxconn plant would begin manufacturing various models of the iPhone.

Apple spokesman Trudy Muller declined to comment, while Foxconn said it did not comment on matters related to current or potential customers, or any of its products.

Until now, California-based Apple has assembled only the lower-



Workers adjusting the iPhone XS advertisement in India. Taiwanese contract manufacturer Foxconn will be assembling the most expensive models, such as devices in the iPhone X family in its plant in the Southern state of Tamil Nadu. PHOTO: REUTERS

cost iPhone SE and 6S models in India through its Taiwanese manufacturing partner Wistron's local unit in the Bengaluru technology hub.

Its sales in India have also been fo-

cused on lower-end phones – more than half of its sales volume is driven by models older than the iPhone 8, launched in 2017, according to technology research firm Counterpoint.

Apple launched the pricey iPhone X in 2017 but has cut production of that phone, according to industry analysts, since it began selling the newer versions, iPhone XS

and XR, globally last year.

Still, it could potentially get Foxconn to make the older iPhone X version in India, where it sells cheaper models in a bid to get a bigger share

of the world's fastest-growing major mobile phone market. Full details of Apple's deal with Foxconn are not yet clear and could change.

It is not known if any of the iPhone assembly is being moved from existing Foxconn factories in China and elsewhere. It is also unclear whether the production will be confined to assembly or include any component production in India.

For Apple, widening assembly beyond China is critical to mitigate the risks of the US-China trade war.

Foxconn, the world's biggest electronics contract manufacturer, is considering setting up a factory in Vietnam, Vietnamese state media reported last month. If that goes ahead, it will be one of the biggest recent steps by a major company to secure an additional production base outside of China.

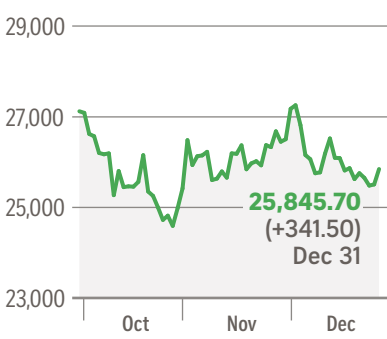
Foxconn has previously admitted the trade spat was its biggest challenge and that its senior executives were making plans to counter the impact.

"Widening iPhone manufacturing in India through Foxconn will allow Apple to hedge the risk of any new US trade policies," said Mr Navkendar Singh, an associate research director at International Data Corporation.

Indian taxes on import of devices and components have also heightened Apple's headache in a market where it has only a 1 per cent share by smartphone shipments.

Making more phones locally will help Apple save costly duties and boost Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship drive to make India a manufacturing hub, Mr Singh said. REUTERS

Hang Seng



Shanghai Comp



Nikkei 225



Dow Jones



BullsAndBears

STI up slightly as 2018 ends on optimistic note

Investors hopeful of thaw in US-China relations following Trump's remarks

Navin Sregantan

Local investors breathed a sigh of relief yesterday after managing to close the year on a positive note, following a nerve-racking year.

They have had to face plenty of headwinds in 2018, from a trade conflict between the world's two biggest economies to rising interest rates and slowing global growth, but a sliver of a silver lining emerged yesterday.

Markets here and across the region can thank optimism emanating from renewed hopes of a thaw in United States-China relations after US President Donald Trump said "big progress" had been made in trade talks with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping.

CMC Markets analyst Margaret Yang said: "The Trump-Xi call is a positive catalyst, but the sustainability of this rally is dependent on more concrete details in trade negotiations to substantiate it."

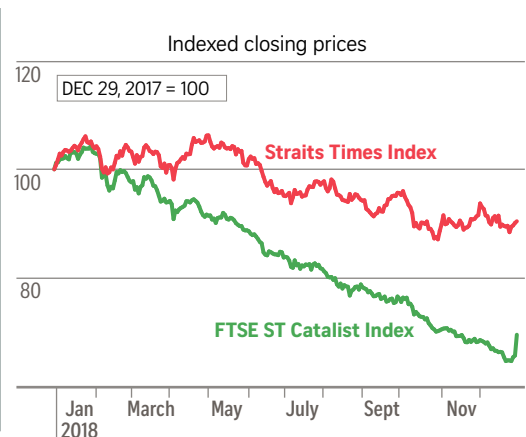
Among the key Asian indices, the Hang Seng posted the biggest gain yesterday, rising 1.3 per cent, while Australia's ASX 200 closed 0.14 per cent lower after a fourth straight session of gains.

Chinese markets were closed, as were their Japanese and South Korean counterparts.

The Straits Times Index (STI)

Straits Times Index

Dec 31, 2018
3,068.76 ▲
+15.33 (+0.50%)
Current streak
3 days
Day high
3,070.49
Day low
3,061.53
52-week high
3,615.28 (May 2, 2018)
52-week low
2,966.45 (Oct 30, 2018)



FTSE ST Catalyst Index

Dec 31, 2018
309.54 ▲
+1.36 (+0.44%)
Current streak
2 days
Day high
309.54
Day low
306.05
52-week high
490.47 (Jan 29, 2018)
52-week low
304.79 (Dec 27, 2018)

Straits Times Index



FTSE ST All-Share Index

Dec 31, 2018
743.21 ▲
+3.30 (+0.45%)
Current streak
3 days
Day high
743.49
Day low
741.51
52-week high
877.87 (Jan 24, 2018)
52-week low
722.91 (Oct 30, 2018)

here closed up 15.33 points, or 0.5 per cent, at 3,068.76 but ended the year down 9.8 per cent.

Turnover on the half-day of trade was 520 million shares worth \$361 million, with gainers greatly outnumbering losers 206 to 123.

Lion Gold was the most active, ending flat at 0.1 cent with 56.3 million shares changing hands. Other non-index listed activities were Ezion Holdings and Jiutian Chemical.

Eight of the 30 STI constituents ended the day in the red. Food and

beverage player ThaiBev was the most active index stock, closing up 4.3 per cent at 61 cents.

Oil's recent rebound also weighed positively on banking, and offshore and marine stocks. DBS added 0.7 per cent to \$23.69, while OCBC put on 1 per cent to \$11.26 and UOB gained 0.7 per cent to \$24.57.

Consumer electronics firm Creative Technology gained 9.5 per cent to \$3.79. Last week, Creative registered four consecutive days of losses before rebounding last Friday with a 5.5 per cent gain to \$3.46.

A slew of economic releases are likely to dictate market sentiment in the first week of the new year.

Singapore's fourth-quarter advanced gross domestic product figures will be released tomorrow morning. China and the US, as well as major European economies Germany, France and Britain, will release key industrial data tomorrow.

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Straits Times Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	CURRENCY LAST TRADED SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD %	P/BV
286	245	Ascendas Reit	257	+2	3132	6.2	1.2
205	161	CapitaCom Trust	175	+1	3694	4.9	1
388	298	Capitaland	311	+4	3362	3.9	0.7
232	195	CapitaMall Trust	226	-1	2367	4.9	1.1
1360	780	CityDev	812	unch	417	2.2	0.7
251	196	ComfortDelGro	215	unch	2536	4.8	1.8
3128	2265	DBS Grp	2369	+16	1599	6	1.3
968	767	DairyFarm USD	US905	-3	168	2.3	-
141	85.5	Genting Sing	97.5	+0.5	5688	3.6	1.5
39	22.5	Golden Agri-Res	24.5	unch	8758	3.3	0.6
42	23	HPH Trust USD	US245	+10	5156	10.7	0.4
744	588	HongkongLand USD	US630	-10	694	3.2	0.3
6958	5580	JMH USD	US6958	+124	157	2.3	0.7
4149	3155	JSH USD	US3671	-28	69	0.9	0.4
4142	2766	Jardine C&C	3535	+16	113	3.3	1.7
892	567	Keppel Corp	591	+1	1090	3.7	0.9
1404	1036	OCBC Bank	1126	+11	2075	3.3	1.2
585	455	SATS	466	+2	475	3.9	3.2
850	672	SGX	715	+3	497	4.2	8.1
1184	914	SIA	942	+2	422	4.2	0.8
292	232	SPH	235	unch	1008	5.5	1.1
370	319	ST Engineering	349	-1	1018	4.3	5.1
360	243	Sembcorp Ind	254	+4	1016	2	0.7
365	287	Singtel	293	-1	7387	7	1.7
94.5	57.5	ThaiBev	61cd	+2.5	17149	1	3
3037	2380	UOB	2457	+17	1116	4.1	1.2
938	591	UOL	619	+6	707	2.8	0.5
2965	1348	Venture Corp	1395	-1	500	4.3	1.8
331	297	Wilmar Intl	312	-2	2288	3.2	0.9
166	84	YZJ Shipbldg SGD	125	+2	5607	3.6	0.9

FTSE ST Large & Mid-Cap Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	CURRENCY LAST TRADED SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD %	P/BV
286	245	Ascendas Reit	257	+2	3132	6.2	1.2
127	105	Ascott Reit	108	+1	2585	6.6	0.9
78.5	59	Bumitama Agri	62	-2	307	1.2	1.4
185	143	CDL HTrust	146	unch	616	-	1
205	161	CapitaCom Trust	175	+1	3694	4.9	1
388	298	Capitaland	311	+4	3362	3.9	0.7
232	195	CapitaMall Trust	226	-1	2367	4.9	1.1
1360	780	CityDev	812	unch	417	2.2	0.7
251	196	ComfortDelGro	215	unch	2536	4.8	1.8
3128	2265	DBS Grp	2369	+16	1599	6	1.3
968	767	DairyFarm USD	US905	-3	168	2.3	-
78	59	Far East HTrust	60.5	unch	646	-	0.7
197	150	First Resources	154	unch	383	4.4	2
236	211	Fraser's Cpt Tr	217	-1	475	3.9	3.2
119	101	Fraser's L&I Tr	103	+1	2589	6.7	1.1
141	85.5	Genting Sing	97.5	+0.5	5688	3.6	1.5
39	22.5	Golden Agri-Res	24.5	unch	8758	3.3	0.6
234	167	GuocoLand Ltd	180	+4	31	3.9	0.5
42	23	HPH Trust USD	US245	+10	5156	10.7	0.4
744	588	HongkongLand USD	US630	-10	694	3.2	0.3
6958	5580	JMH USD	US6958	+124	157	2.3	0.7
4149	3155	JSH USD	US3671	-28	69	0.9	0.4
4142	2766	Jardine C&C	3535	+16	113	3.3	1.7
59	44.5	Keppel Infra Tr	48.5	unch	1333	7.7	1.7
892	567	Keppel Corp	591	+1	1090	3.7	0.9
133	108	Keppel Reit	114	-1	2416	5	3.8
215	151	Man Oriental USD	209	+1	1729	5.5	0.9
273	170	Mapletree Com Tr	165	-1	1411	5.5	1.1
172	152	Mapletree Log Tr	191	+2	1547	6.2	1.3
213	184	Mapletree NAC Tr	126	unch	6167	6	1.1
138	118	Mapletree NBN Tr	114	+1	2167	6.6	0.9
128	107	NetLink NBN Tr	76.5	+0.5	4655	-	1
84	73	OCBC Bank	1126	+11	2075	3.3	1.2
1404	1036	OCBC Bank	1126	+11	2075	3.3	1.2
215	136	OUE	143	+2	16	2.1	0.3
92.5	64.5	OUE HTrust	67	+0.5	189	-	0.9
250	157	Olam Intl	165	+2	285	4.5	0.9
60.8	28	Oxley	29	unch	437	5.2	0.8
306	256	ParkwayLife Reit	263	-3	76	5.1	1.5
121	98	Raffles Medical	110	unch	621	2	2.6
458	455	SATS	466	+2	475	3.9	3.2
850	672	SGX	715	+3	497	4.2	8.1
1184	914	SIA	942	+2	422	4.2	0.8
337	220	SIA Engineering	227	-4	360	5.7	1.7
292	232	SPH	235	unch	1008	5.5	1.1
109	98	SPHREIT	100	-1	333	5.5	1.1
370	319	ST Engineering	349	-1	1018	4.3	5.1
360	243	Sembcorp Ind	254	+4	1016	2	0.7
281	149	Sembcorp Marine	154	+1	1931	1.3	1.4
58.5	39	Silverlake Axis	41.5	+0.5	206	7.2	6
147	88.5	SingPost	91.5	+1	747	3.8	1.2
365	287	Singtel	293	-1	7387	7	1.7
299	158	StarHub	175	-1	606	9.1	5.4
78.5	63.5	StarhillGbl Reit	68	unch	396	6.7	0.7
225	163	Suntree Reit	178	-1	2219	5.6	0.9
94.5	57.5	ThaiBev	61cd	+2.5	17149	1	3
10.2	3.7	Thomson Medical	7.5	unch	2280	-	2.7
3037	2380	UOB	2457	+17	1116	4.1	1.2
938	591	UOL	619	+6	707	2.8	0.5
2965	1348	Venture Corp	1395	-1	500	4.3	1.8
331	297	Wilmar Intl	312	-2	2288	3.2	0.9
244	183	Wing Tai	193	-1	124	4.1	0.4
166	84	YZJ Shipbldg SGD	125	+2	5607	3.6	0.9
191	116	Yanlord Land	122	-1	317	5.6	0.5

FTSE ST Small-Cap Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	LAST SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD %	P/BV
145	129	AIMSAMP Cap Reit	133	unch	158	7.7	1
71	48	Accordia Golf Tr	50.5	-1	243	7.6	0.6
90.5	74	Ascendas-hTrust	77	-0.5	179	-	0.8
119	99	Ascendas-iTrust	108	+1	331	5.6	1.3
60	12.2	Asian Pay TV Tr	12.7	+0.2	1165	51.2	0.2
67	48	Banyan Tree	57.5	-	-	1.7	0.7
275	115	Best World	263	+2	779	1.6	9.4
88	76	Boustead	80	-0.5	6	3.8	1.2
126	79.5	BreadTalk	82	+1.5	309	8.5	2.2
658	521	Bukit Sembawang	565	+1	3	3.2	1.2
88.5	65.5	Cache Log Trust	69.5	-0.5	250	10.4	1
57	39.5	Centurion	41.5	+0.5	38	6	0.8
171	104	China Aviation	106	+2	202	4.2	0.9
475	30	China Everbright	30	unch	80	1.6	0.6
165	90.5	China Sunshine	126	-1	245	2.4	1.4
107	64	Chip Eng Seng	66	unch	1784	6.1	0.5
53.5	31.5	Cosco	33	+0.5	1783	-	1.4
700	260	Delong	631	unch	0	-	0.6
28	17.5	Duty Free Intl	19.6	-	-	9.4	1.3
79	67.5	EC World Reit	69	unch	19	8.7	0.8
59.5	47	ESR-REIT	51	+0.5	704	7.5	0.9
142	92	First Reit	98.5	+1	190	8.7	1
155	134	Fraser's Com Tr	137	unch	634	7	0.9
82.5	66.5	Fraser's HTrust	70	-1	14	-	0.9
28.5	16.4	Geo Energy Res	16.8	+0.1	509	6	1
91	70.5	HRnetGroup	80	+0.5	27	2.9	2.5
70	52	Health Mgt Intl	54	unch	29	0.6	5.2
279	73	Hi-P Intl	88.5	+2	3274	28.2	1.3
283	252	Hong Leong Fin	254	-1	51	5.1	0.6
82.5	71	IREIT Global	72.5	+0.5	39	8.2	1
42	18.3	Indofood Agri	19.1	+0.1	103	-	0.2
79.5	43	Japfa	73	+1	481	0.7	1.4
84.5	49.5	KSH	50	-2	60	4.4	0.8
86.9	53	Kep-KBS Reit USD	61	+1.5	1031	-	0.5
148	128	Keppel DC Reit	135	-1	266	5.3	1.3
188	132	Keppel T&T	186	-1	46	1.9	1.2
119	7	KrisEnergy	73	+0.1	3522	-	0.9
79.5	44.5	Lian Beng	46.5	-0.5	259	4.8	0.3
42.5	18	Lippo Malls Tr	18.2	-0.1	743	18.9	0.7
55.5	30.5	MM2 Asia	31.5	unch	187	-	1.8
98.5	69.5	ManulifeReit USD	77	unch	688	7.2	0.7
121	95	Metro	101	+1	36	5	0.6
32	5	Noble	8.1	susp	-	-	-
66.9	45	OUE Com Reit	46	unch	475	10.2	0.5
68	54	PEC	57.5	-	-	3.5	0.6
46	17.6	POSH	17.7	-	-	-	0.5
66	44.5	Q&M Dental	50	-1	22	3.2	3.6
117	55.5	QAF Ltd	58.5	-1	9	8.5	0.7
86.5	70	RHT HealthTrust	73	+0.5	79	6.2	1
124	96	Riverstone	114	unch	4	2	3.7
55	22	SIIC Environment	27.5	unch	79	-	0.5
45	38	Sabana Reit	39	-0.5	321	8.5	0.7
119	90	Sheng Siong	106	unch	322	3.1	5.8
25.5	12	Sino Grandness	12.3	unch	0	-	0.2
72	56	Soilbuild&BizReit	58	unch	101	9.8	0.9
129	83	Tianjin ZX USD	85	-1.5	24	-	0.7
50	32.5	Tuan Sing	36	+0.5	761	1.7	0.4
136	54	UMS	57	+1.5	1475	8.8	1.3
112	58.5	Valuetronics	66	+0.5	539	6.9	15.1
17.8	8.3	Ying Li Intl	11.6	-0.3	2325	-	0.3
55	24	Yoma Strategic	34	+1	1990	0.7	0.9
37.5	16.1	Yongnam	18.9	+1.1	10914	-	0.4

Keppel unit to buy Beijing commercial building for \$110m

Property in Haidian district, home to China's Silicon Valley

Sue-Ann Tan

A Keppel Corporation unit is acquiring a commercial property in Beijing for 555 million yuan (\$110 million). The block comprises nine storeys of offices covering 8,532 sq m of gross floor area, two retail floors comprising 2,104 sq m of gross floor area and 23 car parking spaces. It was about 97 per cent occupied as of September last year.

The building is in the Greater Wuluju Area of Haidian district, China's first information technology base and home to Zhongguancun, widely known as the country's Silicon Valley. It is directly above the Line 6 Haidian Wuluju Station, connecting it to central Beijing and Tongzhou, the capital's new municipal centre. Once new upgrades are completed by 2021, it will be a key transport hub in West Beijing. The headquarters of the China State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs and China National Space Administration are nearby, as are Renmin University of China, Beijing Foreign Studies University

and Beijing Jiaotong University. The deal announced yesterday involves Keppel Land China acquiring 100 per cent of Beijing Chang Sheng Business Consulting Co, which owns the property. Keppel Land China president Ben Lee said: "The acquisition is in line with our strategy to grow our commercial portfolio in China, with a focus on first-tier cities. "We are confident that this strategically located property will meet the rising demand for prime office and retail space in Beijing. "Securing the project is opportune considering that it is a completed asset enjoying almost full occupancy and in a city where supply

for quality commercial developments is limited." The transaction is expected to be completed in the first quarter this year. Last week, Keppel Land China secured a 4.7ha residential site in the Chengdu Tianfu New Area state-level development zone for a total consideration of 889.7 million yuan in a government land tender. The site is slated to be developed into a residential community with 768 units of high-rise apartments and 96 low-rise units, and is expected to launch in the fourth quarter this year.

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An employee packing a Whole Foods delivery order at a store in Cincinnati. Amazon.com is reportedly expanding the reach of its two-hour delivery service to nearly all of its roughly 475 stores in the United States, as well as other places where it currently has no stores. PHOTO: REUTERS

Amazon to expand Whole Foods stores

BENGALURU • Amazon.com is planning to expand its Whole Foods Market portfolio by adding more stores to put more customers within its two-hour delivery service range, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing sources. Whole Foods employees have looked for retail spaces in Idaho, southern Utah and Wyoming, where it currently has no stores, said the report. The world's largest online retailer plans to expand its two-hour delivery service, Prime Now, to nearly all of its roughly 475 stores in the United States, the Journal said, citing another source. The plans are part of Amazon's grocery, delivery and pick-up

expansions to cities in the US. Prime Now services include a two-hour delivery option to subscribers in more than 60 cities, and online grocery pick-up from Whole Foods stores in 30 minutes from nearly 30 cities, WSJ said. Amazon was not immediately available for comment. "Grocery delivery through Prime Now has been a hit with customers and we're happy to expand the option of grocery pick-up to even more members," Whole Foods Market executive vice-president of operations Christina Minardi said in a statement last November. Amazon last Wednesday announced "a record-breaking holiday season" as its Prime subscrip-

tion service is becoming more and more popular. "In the US alone, more than one billion items were shipped for free this holiday with Prime," said Amazon Worldwide Consumer chief executive Jeff Wilke. In April last year, Amazon disclosed that its Prime members had reached a record total of 100 million customers. Prime and Prime Now services are also available around the world. Amazon Prime Now and Amazon Prime were rolled out in Singapore in July 2017 and December 2017 respectively. It was the e-commerce giant's first foray into the South-east Asian market. REUTERS, XINHUA

Interbank currency rates

Currencies	Against \$	Against S\$	Dec 31 Bid	Dec 31 Offer
\$S/US\$ to one unit of foreign currency:				
Australian dollar	0.9641	0.9645	0.7067	0.7069
Canadian dollar	1.0020	1.0023	0.7346	0.7345
Euro	1.5594	1.5598	1.1431	1.1432
NZ dollar	0.9163	0.9170	0.6717	0.6721
Sterling pound	1.7317	1.7325	1.2694	1.2698
US dollar	1.3642	1.3644	-	-
\$S/US\$ to 100 units of foreign currency:				
Chinese renminbi	19.8242	19.8444	14.5317	14.5444
Danish kroner	20.8846	20.8911	15.3090	15.3116
Hong Kong dollar	17.41	17.42	12.7655	12.7660
Indian Rupee	195	195	14.323	14.325
Indonesia rupiah	0.0094	0.0094	0.0069	0.0069
Japanese yen	123.59	123.64	0.9060	0.9062
Korean won	0.1225	0.1228	0.0089	0.0090
Malaysian ringgit	3.296	3.300	24.1604	24.1838
New Taiwan dollar	4.4643	4.4693	3.2725	3.2757
Norwegian krone	15.6940	15.7004	11.5042	11.5072
Philippine peso	25.950	25.974	19.022	19.037
Saudi riyal	36.3622	36.3704	26.6546	26.6567
Swedish krona	15.1963	15.2087	11.1993	11.1993
Swiss franc	138.4412	138.5178	10.14916	10.15228
Thai Baht	4.1975	4.2007	3.0769	3.0788

Government securities

Period	Issue code	Coupon rate (%)	Maturity	Close Bid	High	Day's Low
2-Year	NY05100N	3.250%	01-Sep-20	102.23	102.26	102.21
5-Year	NX13100H	2.750%	01-Jul-23	103.63	103.70	103.55
10-Year	NX18100A	2.625%	01-May-28	104.94	105.10	105.05
15-Year	NX13100V	3.375%	01-Sep-33	113.72	113.75	113.75
20-Year	NZ16100X	2.250%	01-Aug-36	99.06	99.25	98.60
30-Year	NA16100H	2.750%	01-Mar-46	106.1	0.00	0.00

Note: Based on latest issue

Source: Monetary Authority of Singapore

MSCI INDICES

Dec 28	Index	In local curr %dy	%yr Change
World Preliminary	1433.9	0.4	-9.6
EMEA Preliminary	1006.0	1.1	-13.6
Europe Preliminary	1401.1	1.9	-13.3
Australia	1142.7	1.1	-6.3
Austria Preliminary	498.1	2.4	-25.7
Belgium Preliminary	910.5	0.9	-25.4
Canada Preliminary	1820.4	0.4	-12.3
Denmark Preliminary	7406.9	1.5	-12.5
Finland Preliminary	653.1	1.7	-1.5
France Preliminary	1694.2	1.7	-11.3
Germany Preliminary	843.7	1.5	-20.0
Greece Preliminary	43.0	-0.8	-35.3
India	1263.1	0.8	-0.2
Indonesia	7074.7	-0.2	-5.9
Ireland Preliminary	178.8	2.7	-22.9
Israel Preliminary	230.8	-0.2	-2.4
Italy Preliminary	622.1	1.3	-16.0
Japan	893.2	-0.5	-16.8
Korea	604.1	0.6	-19.3
Malaysia	582.8	0.1	-6.8
Netherlands Preliminary	1445.8	1.3	-12.0
New Zealand	132.5	-0.4	-1.1
Norway Preliminary	2784.9	1.7	-6.4
Pakistan	353.8	-2.6	-22.5
Philippines	1262.2	-0.2	-13.0
Portugal Preliminary	79.4	1.5	-11.3
Singapore	1587.0	0.2	-11.9
Singapore Free	341.2	0.2	-11.9

Source: MSCI

Company Briefs

Transcorp Holdings

Catalist-listed Transcorp Holdings saw its net loss widen by 35 per cent to \$7.22 million in the 2018 financial year, from a loss of \$5.35 million in the previous year. Revenue in the 12 months ended Oct 31 was \$3.82 million, a fall of 37.2 per cent from the year before. This was due largely to a reduction in the number of cars sold, from 52 in the 2017 fiscal year to 25 in the year under review. Higher car rental income and sales of used cars failed to offset the decline. Gross loss also widened to \$1.8 million from \$438,469, as older vehicles were sold at a deeper discount. Loss per share was 2.90 cents in the 2018 fiscal year, widening from a loss per share of 2.23 Singapore cents in 2017. In its results filing on Sunday, Transcorp said: "There continues to be no turnaround in the group's automobile sales business. Strategic initiatives and plans by management to revive this line of business did not produce their intended results." One initiative was to set up a car-leasing business. In January last year, this line of business, which is parked under the subsidiary Stallion Auto, entered into a tie-up with one of the local Grab authorised counters to provide motor-car leasing services to Grab drivers. Transcorp currently has a fleet of 23 cars that are leased out to private-hire car drivers, it said. Net asset value per share was 3.65 cents as at Oct 31, down from 6.50 cents as at Oct 31, 2017. Transcorp shares on the Singapore Exchange were last traded at 1.5 cents.

Charisma Energy Services

Catalist-listed Charisma Energy Services is exiting the electricity retailing business. Charis Electric, a joint-venture company that is 50 per cent owned by Charisma, had obtained an electricity retail licence in Singapore in July 2016, but was never profitable, the group said on Sunday. Both joint-venture partners have agreed to stop spending more resources to further support the business. Charis Electric will be winding up via a creditors' voluntary liquidation. Mr Chee Yoh Chuang and Mr Lin Yueh Hung have been appointed to act, jointly and severally, as liquidators of Charis. The event is not expected to have any material impact on the consolidated net tangible assets and earnings per share of the group. Charis Electric was initially envisioned as a way for Charisma to capture another segment of the power-generation value chain. Ezion Holdings was the joint-venture partner at the time.

தமிழ் மூலம்

India

Daughter repays father who built cricket ground for her

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THE STRAITS TIMES SINGAPOREAN OF THE YEAR 2018
PRESENTED BY UBS

The Straits Times Singaporean of the Year award, organised in partnership with UBS for the fourth year running, seeks to honour the positive impact made by Singaporeans and celebrate the triumph of human spirit

Nizar Mohamed Shariff and Free Food For All
In 2014, Nizar Mohamed Shariff set up Free Food For All, a charity that provides free cooked meals for the needy. The charity cooks up to 100,000 meals a year for 3,000 elderly or low-income residents living in rental flats.

FINALIST

Read about the other finalists at str.sg/soty2018 and tell us who should be the Singaporean of the Year 2018 by Jan 15, 6pm

Cast your vote now at str.sg/soty18vote

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Farewell

Our Dear Friend and Leader, the Late PCC Tommy Choo Tuck Soon

Forever Remembered for his Wisdom, Wit and Courage



By Members of Lions Clubs in Singapore

Alex Lim
Alvin Chan
Amber Sim
Andy Foo
Angeline Woo
Angie Goh
Anthony Kang
Anthony Tay
Aranea Chua
Arthur Tan
Belinda Yap
Betty Ip
Bibiana Koh
Bobby Eng
Carmen Jansen
Cash Tay
Chan Chik Wai
Charlie Chan
Chen Minghui
Chey Chor Khoon

Chia Lai Soon
Chim Hou Yan
Chris Goh
Chua Soo Chiew
Corina Goh
David Lee
David Lim
Dennis Tan
Desmond Leong
Dickie Khoo
Donna Ng
Dora Chan
Doris Chan
E K Tan
Eric Ng
Eugene Tan
Fanni Chan
Gareth Goh
Gilbert Tan
Goh Boo Han

Henry Liang
Jackson Ong
Jeffrey Yang
Jennifer Jern
Jenny Tan
John Tan
Johnny Ee
Joseph Lui
Joyce Woo
K K Woon
Kang K K
Ken Tan
Lai Chong Keng
Lawrence Sew
Lee Keh Bin
Lee Swee Ser
Lena Chua
Les a Gan
Lily Tan
Lim Eng Heng

Lim Kok Wah
Linda Tan
Lo Swee Wen
Loh Yiwen
Lucia Lim
Mary Ong
Nancy Lim
Nancy Lye
Ng Kek Huat
Ou Siang Chin
Peter Tan
Prabhakaran Krishnan
Richard Koong
Rickson Chng
Rita Goh
Ronald Chua
Rosie Eng
S K Ho
Samuel Tay
Sebena Lim

Shirley Lee
Simon Lim
Steven Seah
Susan Lim
Tan Ai Hua
Tan Eng Siong
Tan Siang Tin
Tandy Lim
Terence Lim
V S Kumar
Victor Cheung
Victor Lee
Victor Yip
William Choo
William Kwok
Willie Ho
Wilson Teo
Yeo Siew Yam
Ying Wai Lin
Zen Sim

"Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life." Psalm 23:6



JOHN TAN HOW KEE
Age: 95
Passed away peacefully on 30 December 2018.
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: Ong Cha Boon

Sons:
Tan Puay Heong, Jeffrey
Tan Puay Hwei, Michael

Daughters:
Tan Puay Hong, Maureen (Deceased)
Tan Phuay Luang, Rosalind
Tan Puay Hoon, Pauline

Granddaughters:
Tan Shu Hui, Vanessa
Tan Jia Hui, Valerie
Tan Cui Ting, Charlene
Tan Wan Ting, Shermaine
Ooi Mei Sian, Melissa
Lim Siew Lin, Pearlín

Grandson:
Lim Rong Zhao, Shawn Raphael

Great-Grandsons:
Chai Weijie, David
Chai Junjie, Jonathan
Chai Yongjie, Joseph

Brothers:
Tan How Long
Tan How Chor
Tan How Lit

Sisters:
Tan Peck Kee (Deceased)
Tan Pheok Kheng (Deceased)

Caregiver:
Badriyah

Daughters-in-law:
Low Ngiat Soon, Irene
Kong Chye Yan, Diana

Sons-in-law:
Ooi Seng Soon, Robbie
Lim Cheng Kim, Anthony (Deceased)

Grandsons-in-law:
Zheng Kai Yuan, Dennis
Woo Yuhao, Jonathan

Chai Kian Ping, Stephen
Effandi Bin Mohd Nor

Great-Granddaughter:
Chai Sijie, Rachel

Spouses:
Wang Shae Lan
Wong Chong Jee
Hor Wai Leng

Spouses:
Kang Cheng Buck (Deceased)
Yap Swee Leng (Deceased)

Nephews, Nieces, Grandnephews and Grandnieces

Body is resting at La Verna Chapel, Church of St. Mary of the Angels
5 Bukit Batok East Ave 2 Singapore 659918

Funeral mass will be held at 11.30am on Saturday, 5 January 2019
Cremation will take place at Mandai Crematorium Hall 2 at 1pm.

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household" Acts 16:31



PATRICK CHEAH THYE BEE
Age: 93
Was called home to be with the LORD on 30 Dec 2018.
Dearly missed and lovingly remembered.

Wife: Irene Yeo Sai Tin

Son:
Franklin Cheah Chioh Huat (Went to the Lord in 1977)

Daughter:
Cynthia Cheah Chioh Choo

Son-in-law:
Eric Tan Huck Gim

Granddaughters:
Gabrielle Tan Si'En
Michelle Tan Nian'En
Danielle Tan Huai'En

Grandsons-in-law:
Dave Zhong Bangzhi
Pritish Venke Char

Wake is held at
Blk 123 Kim Tian Road, S160123.
Cortege will leave on 3 Jan at 1pm for
Mass at St Bernadette's Church and
thereafter to Mandai Crematorium Hall 2
for cremation. No wreaths please.

Vivien Shaw Soo Fong



Remembered and Missed always,
by all family and friends


The family of the late



MDM TAN HIOK MING
Departed on 25 December 2018

wish to express their heartfelt thanks and appreciation to relatives, friends, colleagues and business associates for their kind assistance, attendance, condolences, donations and wreaths during their recent bereavement.

Sixteenth Anniversary
In Loving Memory of



LAW YUH FOONG DAVID
30 August 1969 - 1 January 2003
Fondly remembered with love and pride.
rememberdavidlaw@gmail.com

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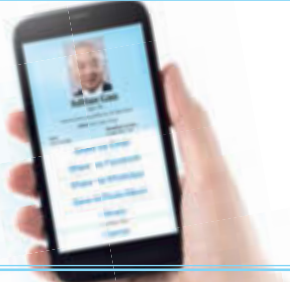
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Days beyond recall.
A vision comes before us,
So calm, so dear, so sweet,
Of her lips now silent
And whose lids are closed in sleep.







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SPORT

87

DAYS TO S'POREAN BOXER MUHAMAD RIDHWAN'S WBC SILVER BELT BOUT C8



Paul Pogba scoring United's second goal past Bournemouth's Bosnian goalkeeper Asmir Begovic in their 4-1 win at Old Trafford on Sunday. He now has four goals in caretaker manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's first three games. PHOTOS: REUTERS

RED DEVILS ENJOY ATTACKING STYLE

Rejuvenated Pogba hails Solskjaer's tactics after his double in United's third straight win

LONDON • Paul Pogba aimed a thinly veiled dig at Jose Mourinho by claiming that he and his Manchester United teammates are playing in the way that they want to since the Portuguese was replaced by Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.

The France midfielder, who was dropped after a series of run-ins with Mourinho, has scored four times, including a brace in the 4-1 win over Bournemouth on Sunday, in the three Premier League games under Solskjaer.

The World Cup winner suggested that the interim appointment had given the United squad a new lease of life, claiming the players were playing in an attacking way that they enjoy, which was not the case under the Portuguese.

"It's different," the 25-year-old Pogba, who became the first United player to score at least twice in consecutive league games since Wayne Rooney in 2012, said.

"We still won some games with the old manager, it's just a different style of play. We are more offensive, we create more chances and play higher.

"This is how we want to play, we want to attack. The manager wants to attack. And that's what we are doing on the pitch."

It took less than four minutes for Old Trafford to be sure that the Solskjaer honeymoon was still in full swing. Marcus Rashford took the ball out near the touchline and there was seemingly nowhere for him to go with his back to goal.

But he, too, is revitalised. For his first trick, he turned sharply, slipping the ball one side of Nathan Ake and running around the other; for his second, pulling off an "elastico" that Ronaldinho would have been proud of to dart past a flummoxed Diego Rico.

Freed to play as a No. 10, Pogba was waiting to meet Rashford's low

cross with a sliding finish.

It was the second time in three games that United had scored in the first five minutes; they had managed it just twice in the previous 25. The handbrake is off.

Bournemouth had a back five hoping to keep things tight, but they had no answer to the dominant hosts' swashbuckling style, going two down in 33 minutes after Pogba equalled his best tally of nine in one season for the club.

Rashford made it three before Ake pulled one back for the Cherries in first-half added time.

Pogba also felt the Red Devils have rediscovered their ambition and a winning mentality after beating Cardiff, Huddersfield and Bournemouth during Solskjaer's brief time in charge.

He said: "It was a great performance as well so we're coming back. There is still a long way to go, but to finish the year like that is beautiful.

"Maybe we have just realised that we are Manchester United and we need to be at the top of the league. You've seen the reaction of the play-

ers. Everyone is enjoying themselves and that's what we need."

He was denied his hat-trick by Asmir Begovic's fingertips before substitute Romelu Lukaku netted United's fourth, while Eric Bailly was sent off for senselessly scything down Ryan Fraser for the only blemish of the game.

Solskjaer was delighted with the £89 million (\$\$154.1 million) club-record signing's display and challenged Pogba to maintain his consistency ahead of tomorrow's league trip to Newcastle.

"That is a top performance from a midfielder because it's all-round, it's work rate, it's dangerous," the United caretaker manager said.

"He plays the efficient game and Paul knows he's at his best when he plays that game.

"It is the same I have said to all the players – we want to see the best out of them, enjoying themselves, expressing themselves, within the framework of how we want to see the team play. All of them have really performed up to top standards."

REUTERS, THE TIMES, LONDON



POGBA'S PRODUCTIVITY UP

	UNDER MOURINHO	UNDER SOLSKJAER
GAMES	14	3
GOALS	3	4
ASSISTS	3	3
AVERAGE MINUTES	81	90

City must beat Liverpool to stay in title race: Guardiola

LONDON • Win or bust. That was the stark message from Pep Guardiola to his Manchester City players, that failure to beat Liverpool at the Etihad Stadium on Thursday would effectively end their title tilt.

The Premier League champions revived their bid to retain their title with a 3-1 win at Southampton on Sunday that followed shock defeats by Crystal Palace and Leicester.

City are still seven points behind leaders Liverpool and Guardiola knows his side have zero margin for error now, saying: "We knew it, that with the position of Liverpool, if we drop points, then it (the title race) is over.

"It would be almost impossible. Of course, they are going to drop

points but not too many.

"If you want to be there as far as possible until the end, we have to remember what happened last season and this as well – apart from the last few days."

He was adamant he had not lost confidence in his side, despite the Palace and Leicester reverses.

"How can I doubt them?," said the Spaniard. "Football is like this. We make 30 exceptional minutes again, especially without the ball, we create chances to go 2-0 or 3-0, we concede one goal.

"Against Palace and Leicester, they were happy with 1-1 and they found a second one.

"I always judge our intentions of the game and always our intentions

are to try."

But Guardiola also admitted the monumental task facing his side as they were facing "the best team in Europe or the world".

He added: "That's why it's a challenge for us (on) Thursday, to try and win and sustain this position as far as possible to arrive at the end of the season fighting for the title.

"We won a lot of games but unfortunately we lost two and we have a rival (Liverpool) who at the moment is the best."

City may again be without Kevin de Bruyne against Liverpool after he missed the Saints game with a muscle problem, but Guardiola rejected suggestions that their victory over Ralph Hasenhuttl's men

had "sent a message" to the Reds.

He told reporters: "Liverpool know what they have to do, we know what we have to do (on) Thursday.

"Of course, it's important to win. It's almost a final for us and we want to be there as long as possible for the Premier League.

"I know the distance is big, seven points, especially because they're so solid and consistent, but we're at home.

"Hopefully our people at the Etihad can help, they can support us. Not just for the game, but these players deserve it. What they have done in the last 14 or 15 months, how they defend this club is incredible, it's massive." AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SQUEAKY BUM TIME

We knew it, that with the position of Liverpool, if we drop points, then it (the title race) is over. It would be almost impossible. Of course, they are going to drop points but not too many.

PEP GUARDIOLA, Manchester City manager, on the importance of Thursday's heavyweight clash with Liverpool.

GUNNERS HAVE 'HELL OF A LOT OF WORK'

Slump will amplify calls to spend but goalie Leno says mistakes are to blame, not injuries

LONDON • Riding high until two weeks ago, Arsenal's season has taken a sudden downturn that has thrown the focus firmly on the club's plans for the January transfer window.

Before the visit to Southampton on Dec 16, the Gunners had gone 22 games without losing and it seemed like the trajectory of Unai Emery's side was undeniably on the up.

The defeat at St Mary's has, however, triggered a downturn with just one win in five games, including Saturday's humiliating 5-1 defeat at Premier League leaders Liverpool. Arsenal now sit five points off the top four and anything less than three points in the home league meeting with Fulham today will further undermine the club's hopes of reclaiming a place in the Champions League.

Pundits have already written off their chances, with former Gunner Martin Keown claiming there was "a hell of a lot of work to do".

He told BT Sport: "Arsenal are in the beginning of their (project)."

Injuries have not helped with defenders Nacho Monreal, Hector Bellerin and Shkodran Mustafi all doubts for the Emirates clash, while auxiliary wing-back Ainsley Maitland-Niles and out-of-favour midfielder Mesut Ozil are also uncertainties.

However, goalkeeper Bernd Leno declined to use their growing casualty list – which includes long-

term absentees Rob Holding and Danny Welbeck – as an excuse following the mauling at Anfield, urging his teammates to show their mettle against the Cottagers. The opposition are on a three-game unbeaten run.

"I don't think that was the difference," the German said. "We as a team made too many mistakes. We have enough quality, even when somebody is injured."

"Injuries were not the problem. We have to look forward because we have another important game on Tuesday."

"It's the first game of the year and

on Tuesday, we want to beat Fulham at home. We need to win."

Defender Stephan Lichtsteiner also vowed that the team would "never give up" on their bid to finish among the Champions League places, saying: "We'll aim for that. Until the end we'll work, we'll believe... It's a challenge and one we need to accept."

But burly Fulham striker Aleksandar Mitrovic, who ended a six-game drought to sink Huddersfield at the weekend, will surely relish the challenge of pitting his wits against a makeshift and vulnerable Gunners backline that has already let in 30 league goals – five more than at the same point last term.

The Serb, who has scored eight league goals this season, has been their star player and he felt his winner "gives us confidence before facing Arsenal".

The coming weeks, starting with Fulham, will go a long way towards shaping the remainder of Arsenal's season. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ARSENAL V FULHAM
Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, 11pm

A flustered Aaron Ramsey after missing another chance for Arsenal in their 5-1 thrashing by Liverpool at Anfield on Saturday. The Gunners, who have leaked 30 league goals so far, must beat second-last Fulham today at home to revive their Champions League hopes. PHOTO: REUTERS



Premier League talking points

1

LOCADIA FINDS HIS FOOTING

Former Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger used to say that an overseas recruit arriving in the Premier League needed 12 months to get up to speed and that adage still holds true today.

Jurgen Locadia joined Brighton from PSV Eindhoven last January and until Boxing Day, he had not scored in 10 months.

But having netted against Arsenal and Everton in successive league games, and looking perfectly at home, it is a reminder that the speed at which players are judged nowadays can be highly counterproductive.

2

PALACE LOOKING FOR GOALS

Crystal Palace's shortcomings have been obvious all season, with their pursuit of Liverpool forward Dominic Solanke an acknowledgement reinforcements are required given they have failed to score in seven of 10 home league games this season.

The Daily Mail has claimed the 21-year-old has undergone a medical check, with his loan move set to be rubber-stamped. His arrival in the transfer window cannot come soon enough.

Wilfried Zaha, far from a natural striker, is cutting an increasingly frustrated figure up front and needs support, having scored only three league goals this term.

3

HART OUT, HEATON IN?

It would be unfair to blame Joe Hart for Burnley's stuttering form this season, as Tom Heaton's return was not the only factor in securing a clean sheet and home win against West Ham.

But the goalkeeping switch was evidently popular with the Turf Moor faithful, who ended up chanting Heaton's name.

It might be Hart's turn now for a spell on the sidelines, with the Claret's mired in a relegation dogfight.

THE GUARDIAN

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE										
	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts			
1 Liverpool	20	17	3	0	48	8	54			
2 Man City	20	15	2	3	54	16	47			
3 Tottenham	20	15	0	5	43	21	45			
4 Chelsea	20	13	4	3	38	16	43			
5 Arsenal	20	11	5	4	42	30	38			
6 Man Utd	20	10	5	5	41	32	35			
7 Wolves	20	8	5	7	23	23	29			
8 Leicester	20	8	4	8	24	23	28			
9 Watford	20	8	4	8	27	28	28			
10 Everton	20	7	6	7	31	30	27			
11 West Ham	20	8	3	9	27	30	27			
12 Bournemouth	20	8	2	10	28	37	26			
13 Brighton	20	7	4	9	22	27	25			
14 Crystal Palace	20	5	4	11	17	26	19			
15 Newcastle	20	4	6	10	15	27	18			
16 Cardiff	20	5	3	12	19	38	18			
17 Southampton	20	3	6	11	21	38	15			
18 Burnley	20	4	3	13	19	41	15			
19 Fulham	20	3	5	12	18	43	14			
20 Huddersfield	20	2	4	14	12	35	10			

'Fuming' Spurs must not dwell on loss: Winks

LONDON • Harry Winks has admitted that the deflating 3-1 home defeat by Wolves on Saturday, which stalled Tottenham's Premier League title challenge as soon as it got started, left the Spurs dressing room "fuming".

But the midfielder urged his teammates "not to get carried away with a defeat" before their visit to a rejuvenated Cardiff today.

The Bluebirds are in decent form, having garnered four points from their last two league games, including an impressive win at Leicester over the weekend, and Winks knows more frustration will await should Spurs slip up again.

He said: "What people say on social media, that is their own opinion, but inside the club, we know

how far we can go. We have belief.

"To be considered title contenders and to be sitting disappointed that we aren't closer to the top than we'd expect, it just shows us how well we are doing."

But despite Spurs' best first half to a league season, it remains hard to avoid the view that their bid for success on four fronts could once again leave them empty-handed.

Spurs manager Mauricio Pochettino cited mental fatigue, post-World Cup, as a possible reason for the lethargic second-half display against Wolves. His team had nine players in the semi-finals of the tournament in Russia, more than any other club.

The delay to the opening of their new stadium has also meant Wemb-

ley remains their temporary home, while this month's two-legged League Cup semi-final with Chelsea will be followed by their last-16 Champions League tie against Borussia Dortmund next month.

This Friday sees Spurs start their FA Cup campaign with a visit to fourth-tier Tranmere Rovers, a further addition to an already-congested holiday fixture schedule.

The counter to all that is that a club with ambitions of challenging for major trophies must expect to face those kinds of demands.

And that is where criticism of their failure to bring in new players in the summer resurfaces – although there could be reinforcements with the January transfer

window under way.

Squad depth is so often the key to success and while Spurs' success in keeping the current group of players together was admirable, right now, it appears as though fresh additions would be welcome.

That is particularly so given Son Heung-min, arguably Pochettino's form player, will join up with South Korea at the Asian Cup this month.

However, captain Hugo Lloris still feels that all the ingredients are in place this season for Spurs to win

their first piece of silverware since the 2008 League Cup.

Insisting they are "reducing the gap with the best", the France goalkeeper said: "This (trophies) is what we work for. We are in the most competitive country, so we keep working with the same mentality and do our best."

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

CARDIFF V TOTTENHAM
Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, tomorrow, 1.30am

Toffees aim to start new year on winning note

LONDON • With two losses and three draws in the Premier League, Goodison Park has not exactly been a fortress this season, much to Jordan Pickford's chagrin.

Everton also have just one win in their last seven league games, but the goalkeeper has demanded they "get that (winning) momentum going", starting with Leicester today.

Urging his teammates to arrest a three-game winless home run, he said on the Everton website:

"Leicester is another tough game and it comes less than 70 hours after we finished at Brighton, but our target is to get the three points."

"If we get that result, it will spark a good start to the new year. We did not get the result we wanted to finish off 2018, but that is football and we have another game to turn it around in a short space of time."

"Yes (we have goals in the side) but we couldn't get that one against Brighton (losing 1-0 on Saturday).

"We work hard and we have a lot of depth in our squad and hopefully, those things will help us achieve the win."

Like the Toffees, the Foxes are no model of consistency after crashing back down to earth following their last-minute 1-0 league loss at home to Cardiff at the weekend.

The manner of the loss was bitterly disappointing for the King Power faithful as it had come on the back of two impressive league

wins in succession over Chelsea and champions Manchester City.

But Leicester midfielder Nampalys Mendy told his teammates on the club website to "stay focused" and put that upset to the back of their minds ahead of their trip to Merseyside as they had "a big game against Everton".

EVERTON V LEICESTER
Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, 8.30pm

LOTTERY

TOTO

Latest results not available by press time.
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Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Tue, 1 Jan 2019				
A League	Western Sydney	Melbourne City	4.50pm	LW
English Premier	Everton	Leicester	8.30pm	LW
English Premier	Arsenal	Fulham	11.00pm	LW
English League Champ	Derby	Middlesbrough	11.00pm	LW
English League Champ	Nottingham	Leeds	11.00pm	LW
Wed, 2 Jan 2019				
English Premier	Cardiff	Tottenham	1.30am	LW

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BIG SWITCH FOR REVENGE BOUT

Ridhwan will train in Philippines with coach Joven Jimenez for rematch against Ambunda

Sazali Abdul Aziz

It is a new year, and for Singapore's top professional boxer Muhammad Ridhwan, this means a new approach.

For the first time since turning pro three years ago, the 31-year-old will not work with long-time trainer Rey Caitom Jr to prepare for a fight – the World Boxing Council (WBC) silver featherweight title bout against Namibian Paulus Ambunda on March 29 in the Republic.

Instead, he will spend over two months under another Filipino coach, Joven Jimenez, at the Survival Camp. The training facility for

boxers in Cavite province about three hours' drive south of Manila is run by International Boxing Federation super flyweight world champion Jerwin Ancajas, who was dubbed "the next Manny Pacquiao" by legendary promoter Bob Arum.

Ridhwan lost a split decision to Ambunda after 12 rounds in a fight for the International Boxing Organisation (IBO) world super bantamweight title on Sept 29, his only defeat in 12 pro fights.

The rematch is a chance to gain a measure of revenge in the biggest fight for any Singaporean. Mexican Saul "Canelo" Alvarez (super welterweight) is one well-known fighter who is a former silver champion.

The change in approach is partly due to Caitom, 32, a six-time Philippine national amateur boxing champion, returning to competitive action himself in November.

Ridhwan told The Straits Times: "The change may take a while to get used to, but Rey and I still have a good relationship.

"It's too bad we don't get to end something we started together, but this is a job for both of us and we are professionals."

Caitom said he was inspired to return by Ridhwan's rise in the international scene after he signed with promoter Ringstar in 2017. The Singaporean is now recognised by the WBC as the world's 28th-ranked super bantamweight.

Caitom, who is also with Ringstar, had hung up his gloves in 2006 undefeated in seven pro fights because of issues with the Cebu gym



Top local pro boxer Muhammad Ridhwan with Joven Jimenez, head trainer at the Survival Camp in Cavite, Philippines, during his earlier training stint. PHOTO COURTESY OF MUHAMAD RIDHWAN

he trained at. But he said his decision to compete again was not key to the split between him and Ridhwan.

"Before it happened, Scott (O'Farrell, Ringstar chief executive) already had an idea that Ridhwan would go for a training camp somewhere else," he told ST.

"They asked me if that was okay with me, and I had no problems with it, as long as it is good for Ridhwan."

Said O'Farrell: "Joven is now going to take over as Ridhwan's head coach and be in his corner on the night, because we need that experience to take Ridhwan to the top.

"Rey has done a fantastic job and

we love him to bits, and he's still a part of the team.

"But now I want him to concentrate on his own boxing career, so I've given him a two-year contract to see where we can go and how far we can take him.

"Everybody's on track, everybody's aligned and everybody's happy."

Ridhwan had spent two weeks at the Survival Camp in November training alongside the likes of Ancajas and minimum weight Mark Barriga, who was then preparing for a world title fight on the same card as the Deontay Wilder-Tyson Fury superfight last month.

He said he discovered he had

good chemistry with Jimenez, and is confident that the coach, and the camp's secluded location, will get him to where he wants to be for his rematch with Ambunda.

"It's a much simpler life there, like living in a kampung," said the Singaporean, who will fork out about US\$4,500 (\$6,140) for his time at the camp.

"We have no Wi-Fi, and mobile data is limited. It takes a while to get used to. In Singapore, I'm always busy with coaching and so on.

"But it's good because I can stay away from unnecessary distractions, and focus purely on training."

He added he hopes training and sparring with world champions and contenders there will take his abilities to the next level.

"I can learn a lot from the elite boxers, about the way they carry themselves in training," he said.

"When the media or cameras are around, they go easy, so few people see just how hard they work and the humility they have in the ring.

"To see someone like Jerwin, who is a world champion, training like he is an up-and-coming challenger, that motivates me to want to train that hard too."

Ticket details for Ridhwan's March 29 fight will be released on Jan 14.

msazali@sph.com.sg

Serena takes singles but US lose to Greece

Serena Williams overcame rust and ankle problems to beat Maria Sakkari 7-6 (7-3), 6-2 in the women's singles match of the United States v Greece Hopman Cup tie in Perth, Australia, yesterday. In her first competitive match since losing the US Open final, she levelled the scores at 1-1 after partner Frances Tiafoe was beaten 6-3, 6-7 (3-7), 6-3 by Stefanos Tsitsipas. Greece won the deciding Fast4 mixed doubles 4-1, 1-4, 4-2 to clinch the Group B tie. Today, Williams and fellow legend Roger Federer will face off across the net for the first time when the US play defending champions Switzerland in the two-player, mixed team event. PHOTO: EPA-EFE



SportsWorld

Dinnage changes her mind on EPL top post

LONDON • Susanna Dinnage has shocked English football by deciding she no longer wants to be the chief executive of the Premier League despite previously accepting the post.

Dinnage, the global president of Discovery's Animal Planet, was revealed as the successor to Richard Scudamore, with her appointment hailed as a major step forward for women in sports administration.

However, the league announced on Sunday that despite committing to the role in November, she had now changed her mind. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

New dad Sharma pulls out of final Test

SYDNEY • Middle-order batsman Rohit Sharma will miss the crucial final cricket Test in Sydney after flying home to spend time with his wife and new baby daughter, India announced yesterday.

The 31-year-old jetted back to Mumbai straight after the tourists won the third Test against Australia on Sunday.

No replacement has been called up, with India leading the series 2-1. The fourth Test starts on Thursday. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SportingLife

A new year, a new start and a new chance to break new ground



Rohit Brijnath

Assistant Sports Editor

By March you might have doubts, by May you might be injured, by July tired, by September defeated. But this is January, this is a new year, a new day, a new chance. This is promises made to the self, goals written, ambitions listed, resolutions catalogued. This is the chase for your finest self out there shimmering in the distance. This is the new beginning. Last year is gone, the medals are

in cupboards, the failures are in diaries, the learning is in your head. It doesn't matter if you stagnated, failed, tripped in 2018, you still found something constructive in it. Because this is who you are, an accredited member of the silver-lining clan. People mock last place but you'll still squeeze positives out of it. It's why ordinary folk just don't get you.

Michelangelo once noted that "every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it". In sport, you're the stone and also the sculptor. You're trying to chisel out your best self and every year you discover more of yourself.

You're proud about what you did in 2018. Proud that you used boxing "to spread positive messages" and to "inspire people close to you" as Muhammad Ridhwan did. Proud about "fencing without my personal weapons" and "adapting and trusting my skills during these challenging times" as fencer Amita Berthier did.

You're proud about a skill honed, a hardship handled, a lesson learnt. Young diver Jonathan Chan learnt how "competition experience is super important" and swimmer Roanne Ho discovered a reservoir of courage. "I'm proud of myself,"

she says, "for finally being brave enough to come forward and talk about my struggles.

"My depression and anxiety was something I hid for a long time because I was ashamed of it. I think this year I learnt that it's OK to not be OK and I'm glad that by sharing my story I have also helped others to accept that there's nothing wrong if they too are struggling."

You've stored 2018 in your bones, it's in your head, your muscle memory, your nervous system, your heart. Maybe you're calmer. Maybe your grip on your gun has changed and so has your bounce on the diving board.

You're a little better. But then you'd better be for 2019.

You know we're waiting to be impressed by you this year, that people will judge you, that your mum who wakes up at 5am to drop you to practice every day is praying in the stands. But you can't think about that, or about funding, or about age and the years passing, you just have to focus on the goals.

The small ones and the big ones. The ones you write down in a notebook. Or tape to your wall. Or lock in that closet in your head where outsized dreams live. There are great things you want to achieve but first there are small things you need to master.

Michelangelo once noted that "every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it". In sport, you're the stone and also the sculptor. You're trying to chisel out your best self and every year you discover more of yourself.

"Patience when fighting in the ring and also in life" is what Ridhwan wants to be in command of. "To pace myself and trust myself more than ever" is Berthier's challenge. Overcoming the tittering voices of negativity in her head is bowler Shayna Ng's wish and "improving on my recovery" is Paralympic champ Yip Pin Xiu's aim.

Jasmine Ser, the shooter, who has to keep her 5kg rifle completely

still for 60 shots, wants to be "physically fitter". He wants to be "more open-minded and accepting, to not get flustered when things aren't going according to plan and trust that in time, they will".

This is what you'll chase and most people will never see it because most of it happens in the no-applause land of solitary practice. But this is who you are, and all these swimming laps, and football free kicks, and hundreds of rifle shots, represent your great and grand devotion to your cause.

"It is," says Toh Wei Soong, the para swimmer, "the best feeling in the world when you know that you can improve and that the opportunity is right to do so.

"You want to seize it quickly and be the best you can be, if only because the parts of the puzzle have been revealed to you so far. Now it is only a matter of putting them together: the picture has already been glimpsed."

So this is 2019. The year of new parts and pieces, of breaking new ground and awakening to new dawns, of athletic sculptors chiselling away at stone to produce that intriguing thing.

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SPORT

LAKERS GET FIRST LEBRON-LESS WIN

Los Angeles overcome Sacramento with late surge on injured superstar's 34th birthday

LOS ANGELES • The Los Angeles Lakers erased a seven-point fourth-quarter deficit on the way to a 121-114 victory over the Sacramento Kings on Sunday, their first victory in the National Basketball Association without LeBron James since their superstar injured his groin in a Christmas Day game.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope led the Lakers with 26 points off the bench. Josh Hart added 22 and Brandon Ingram 21 for the Lakers, who outscored the Kings 29-18 in the final period to give James – cheering from the bench on his 34th birthday – extra reason to celebrate.

The Lakers also avenged their last-second defeat at Sacramento on Thursday, when Bogdan Bogdanovic hit a three-pointer at the

buzzer. The Lakers went on a 12-0 run late in the fourth quarter to turn a 110-103 deficit with 4min 30sec remaining into a 115-110 lead with less than two minutes left. They ended the game on an 18-4 run.

“We had to lock in defensively and stay to our game plan,” Caldwell-Pope said after the game. “We got the stops that throughout the first half we didn’t get, when we gave them a lot of second-chance points.”

De’Aaron Fox scored 26 points while Bogdanovic and Buddy Hield added 21 each as the Kings lost for the second time in three games, with both of the defeats in Los Angeles. The Kings had lost to the Clippers 127-118 on Wednesday.

Josh Hart scored a season-high

22 points for the Lakers, while Kyle Kuzma added 18. Ingram and Kuzma, who combined for 16 rebounds and 15 assists, have been tasked with picking up the slack for an injured James, who still has no timetable for a return from his groin injury.

In Miami, Karl-Anthony Towns led the Minnesota Timberwolves to a 113-104 victory over the Miami Heat with a stellar game of 34 points, 18 rebounds, seven assists and six blocked shots – a statistical line that drew comparisons to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar’s 35 points, 19 rebounds, nine assists and eight blocks for the Lakers against Phoenix in 1975.

Towns, who also had three steals, connected on 12 of his 24 shots from the field, including three of six from three-point range.

“I wanted to make the right plays that we needed to win,” he said. “I’m glad I was able to make them.”

REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



Lakers guard Kentavious Caldwell-Pope putting up a shot while Kings players Nemanja Bjelica (left) and Bogdan Bogdanovic look on during LA's 121-114 win on Sunday. Caldwell-Pope led the Lakers with 26 points. PHOTO: REUTERS

Next 48 Hours

TODAY

FOOTBALL

English Premier League Everton v Leicester (8.30pm), Arsenal v Fulham (11pm), Cardiff v Tottenham (tomorrow, 1.30am) – Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227.

TENNIS

Hopman Cup Group B: Switzerland v United States (Singtel TV Ch115 & StarHub Ch209, 5.15pm). **Qatar Open** Day 2 (StarHub Ch213, 8.30pm).

TOMORROW

BASKETBALL

ABL Malaysia Dragons v Saigon Heat (StarHub Ch202, 8.30pm).

FOOTBALL

English Premier League Newcastle v Man United (Singtel TV Ch102 & StarHub Ch227, Thursday, 3.45am). Chelsea v Southampton (Ch103 & Ch228), Wolves v Palace (Ch104 & Ch229), West Ham v Brighton (Ch105 & Ch230), Huddersfield v Burnley (Ch106 & Ch231), Bournemouth v Watford (Ch107 & Ch232) – Thursday, 3.35am.

TENNIS

Hopman Cup Group A: France v Germany (9.45am), Australia v Spain (5.15pm) – Singtel TV Ch115 & StarHub Ch209. **Qatar Open** Day 3 (StarHub Ch213, 8.30pm).

Live telecast times are subject to change. For latest updates, go to singtelstv.com.sg & starhubgo.com or check the on-screen TV guide.

The great Australian cricket ‘soap opera’

MELBOURNE • Australia cricket coach Justin Langer yesterday admitted that he feels like a “director of a soap opera” as speculation grew around the futures of banned Steve Smith and David Warner.

Debate about the pair reared again during the third Test against

India in Melbourne, after Smith and Cameron Bancroft gave interviews about the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa last March.

Australia’s woeful batting in the match, which they lost by 137 runs, also drew attention to how much Smith and Warner were missed.

“It’s all just part of the soap opera we’re in every day,” Langer said yesterday ahead of Thursday’s fourth and final Test, with India leading the series 2-1.

“I feel like a director of a soap opera at the moment, I honestly do. “Coaching is about man manage-

ment and looking after people, caring for people, and that was just another distraction last week.”

Bancroft, who was banned for nine months, made his return on Sunday evening for the Perth Scorchers in the Big Bash League, but lasted only three balls.

Smith and Warner’s suspensions run out in late March, and their exile has left a big void in the team.

Aaron Finch has been unable to

reproduce his limited-overs form in the red ball game, Usman Khawaja has struggled and newcomer Marcus Harris at the top of the order has yet to post a big score.

“We’ve got a lot of guys learning on the run at the same time,” said Langer, acknowledging the team’s lack of experience. “That’s not easy for them, but we’ll collectively be better for it over time.”

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Obituaries

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Our deepest sympathy and heartfelt condolences to the family of the late



Vijayakumari D/O Narayanasamy
Patient Service Associate Executive
Call Centre
Singapore General Hospital

From:
**The Management and Staff
Singapore General Hospital**

With Deepest Sympathy & Heartfelt Condolences to The Family of the late



CHUA AI LIN CAROLINE
Passed away peacefully on 31 December 2018

From

The Management & Staff of



LGT Bank (Singapore) Ltd

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Psalm 23:6



Alan Bala

Age: 73

Was called home to the Lord on 30 December 2018. Deeply missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: De Rozario Cresenda Julia (deceased)

Sons:
Jeremiah Bala
Vikram Bala (David)

Grandchildren:
Johannes Isaac Bala
Janelle Kristen Bala

Sister / Brother:
Saraswathi
Balu Raja

Friend:
Andrew

Daughter-in-law:
Nica Ian

Spouse:
G. Maniam

Godchildren, nephews, nieces, all relatives and friends.
Wake at Block 214 Petir Road, Singapore 670214.
Night service on Tuesday 1 January 2019 at 6.30pm.
Cortege leaves on Wednesday 2 January 2019 at 1.00pm for Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 for cremation at 1.40pm.
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life

D **MAKING HIS MARK**
Singer-songwriter Mark Chan turns to art to work through pain and loss
D3



Although time seems to fly by, it never travels faster than one day at a time. Each day is a new opportunity to live your life to the fullest.

— Steve Maraboli

Live more.
Bask less.

You've read it, now watch it

A host of books adapted for screen will hit the TV or cinemas this year



Love them or hate them, book-to-screen adaptations fill 2019's calendar, whether in cinemas or on the small screen.

An adaptation can draw new generations of audiences to a book that has otherwise been gathering dust on the shelf – though purists often rage at the changes to their beloved texts.

Sequel fever is also going strong, from the final season of hit HBO television show *Game Of Thrones* – not strictly following George R.R. Martin's books any more, since he still has not finished writing them – to *It: Chapter Two*, the second part

of the remake of Stephen King's coulrophobia-inducing novel.

More ambitious projects loom on the horizon, such as Netflix taking on 17 works of British children's author Roald Dahl for animated adaptations and the BBC TV adaptation of Philip Pullman's epic fantasy trilogy *His Dark Materials*, which has been renewed for a second season even before the first gets an air date.

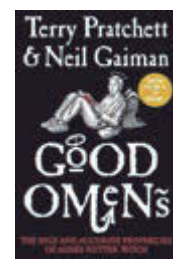
The Straits Times picks 10 of the most exciting book-to-screen adaptations set to come out this year.

oliviah@sph.com.sg



Michael Sheen (left) plays angel Aziraphale, who forms an enemies-with-benefits relationship with a demon, Crowley, played by David Tennant (right), in *Good Omens*. PHOTO: AMAZON STUDIOS

1 GOOD OMENS



What: TV miniseries adapted from Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman's 1990 fantasy novel of the same name.
Directed by: Douglas

Mackinnon

Stars: David Tennant, Michael Sheen, Jon Hamm

When: Early this year on Amazon Prime, followed by conventional broadcast on BBC Two

This Armageddon comedy, in which an angel and a demon team up to prevent the end of the world, has been long in the making.

There have been other failed attempts to adapt the novel by two of Britain's most popular fantasy authors, including a film by director Terry Gilliam.

With Pratchett's death in 2015 from early-onset Alzheimer's disease, it seemed unlikely it would ever get made. But a posthumous request from Pratchett – via a letter – led Gaiman to make a fresh attempt, eventually writing six one-hour episodes.

Mackinnon of *Sherlock* (2010) and *Line Of Duty* (2012) fame directs.

Sheen plays bookish angel Aziraphale, who over millennia has formed an enemies-with-benefits relationship with a demon, Crowley (Tennant), a Bentley-driving Queen fan who, as an angel, "did not so much fall as saunter vaguely downwards".

Their fondness for life on Earth leads to them working together against their supervisors (including Hamm as the archangel Gabriel) to postpone the apocalypse, which lies in the hands of a blissfully unaware 11-year-old Antichrist.

2 LES MISERABLES



What: TV miniseries adapted from Victor Hugo's 1862 novel of the same name.
Directed by: Tom Shankland
Stars: Dominic West, David

Oyelowo, Lily Collins

When: Now on BBC First (StarHub Channel 522) and www.bbcplayer.com

Before the West End musical – think fearsome sideburns and marching on the spot during musical number One Day More – there was Hugo's original 19th-century classic, a more than 1,400-page epic considered to be one of the greatest French novels ever written.

The dizzying historical sweep of the novel follows escaped convict Jean Valjean (West), who is hunted by unyielding police inspector Javert (Oyelowo).

Valjean adopts the young daugh-



Lily Collins stars as the tragic single mother Fantine in the BBC adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. PHOTO: BBC STUDIOS

ter of tragic single mother Fantine (Collins) after she loses her job in his factory and is reduced to prostitution.

The lives of the novel's numerous characters converge years later in Paris at the barricades of the 1832 June Rebellion.

Les Misérables has been adapted several times for the screen, most notably in the 2012 Academy

Award-winning musical film starring Hugh Jackman and Anne Hathaway. The new six-part series sidesteps the musical altogether, returning to the source of Hugo's original.

It is written by Andrew Davies, who successfully crunched another voluminous classic, Leo Tolstoy's Russian epic *War And Peace*, for the BBC in 2016.

3 ARTEMIS FOWL



What: Movie adapted from Eoin Colfer's children's fantasy series (2001 to 2012) of the same name

Directed by: Kenneth Branagh

Stars: Judi Dench, Josh Gad, Ferdia Shaw, Lara McDonnell

When: Aug 8

Walt Disney and acclaimed actor-director Branagh take on this fantasy caper – described by Colfer as "Die Hard with fairies" – in which Irish teenage criminal mastermind Artemis Fowl II (played by newcomer Shaw) discovers an underground fairy world far more technologically advanced than human society.

Artemis Fowl kidnaps fairy cop Holly Short (McDonnell) for ran-

som, hoping to bolster his family's fortune in the wake of his father's disappearance.

With its amoral anti-hero, action-heavy adventure and often scatological humour – a source of which is kleptomaniac dwarf Mulch Diggums (Gad) – *Artemis Fowl* should supply the perfect antidote to those tired of schmaltzy kids' shows. Particularly exciting is the decision to cast renowned English actress Dench as Holly's boss Commander Root, who, in the books, is male.



Judi Dench (centre) plays Commander Root in the Walt Disney film based on Eoin Colfer's children's fantasy series, *Artemis Fowl*. PHOTO: YOUTUBE

MORE STORIES
on D2

FROM D1

4

WHERE'D YOU GO, BERNADETTE



What: Movie adapted from Maria Semple's 2012 novel of the same name.
Directed by: Richard Linklater
Stars: Cate Blanchett, Billy Crudup,

Kristen Wiig, Emma Nelson
When: March 22, in the United States

Blanchett plays the titular character of this New York Times best-selling novel – a brilliant agoraphobic architect whose 15-year-old daughter Bee (Nelson) wants to go on a family holiday to Antarctica.

Persecuted by her neighbour (Wiig) and with her husband (Crudup) having an affair, Bernadette vanishes one day through the bathroom window.

The novel, delightfully quirky yet also dark, includes documentation and correspondence Bee has been collecting to understand her mother's disappearance.

Cate Blanchett plays Bernadette in *Where'd You Go, Bernadette*.

PHOTO: YOUTUBE

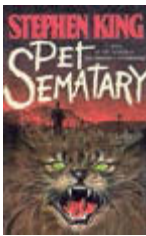


John Lithgow and Jete Laurence in the horror film *Pet Sematary*.
PHOTO: UIP SINGAPORE



5

PET SEMATARY



What: Movie adapted from Stephen King's 1983 horror novel of the same name.
Directed by: Kevin Kolsch and Dennis Widmyer
Stars: Jason Clarke, John

Lithgow, Amy Seimetz
When: April 4

These days, it seems like a year cannot go by without a new King adaptation – from last year's Hulu series *Castle Rock* to 2017's films *It*, *The Dark Tower* and *Gerald's Game*.

This year promises another bumper crop, including *It: Chapter Two*, the sequel to the 2017 film.

Another remake that refuses to stay in the grave is *Pet Sematary*, about a burial ground with the terrible power to resurrect the dead – only they come back wrong.

The book, which King almost never published because he himself found it too horrifying, was inspired by his own experience of having his daughter's cat run over and burying it in the local "pet sematary", as misspelt on the sign.

The 1989 film adaptation by director Mary Lambert received mixed reviews.

(From left) George Clooney, Christopher Abbott and Pico Alexander in *Catch-22*.
PHOTO: PHILIPPE ANTONELLO/HULU



6

CATCH-22



What: TV miniseries adapted from the 1961 Joseph Heller novel of the same name.
Directed by: George Clooney, Grant Heslov, Ellen Kuras

Stars: Christopher Abbott, Kyle Chandler, George Clooney
When: This year

Heller's satirical war novel about bureaucratic absurdity is a school curriculum staple and coined the phrase "catch-22", which describes an inescapable, paradoxical situation with

rules that contradict one another.

Clooney co-directs, executive produces and cameo in this series, starring Abbott as Captain John Yossarian, a United States Army Air Forces B-25 bombardier during World War II.

Yossarian would like to go home, but the more missions he flies, the more his commanding officer, Colonel Cathcart (Chandler), increases the number of missions a soldier must fly before he can be sent home.

The series is a co-production among three networks – Hulu in the US, Channel 4 in Britain and Sky Italia in Italy – and will premiere on all three on a date yet to be confirmed.

7

CHAOS WALKING



What: Movie adapted from Patrick Ness' young adult science-fiction trilogy *Chaos Walking* (2008 to 2010)
Directed by: Doug Liman
Stars: Tom Holland, Daisy Ridley, Mads Mikkelsen, Nick Jonas
When: This year

In Ness' dystopian trilogy, which has won prestigious awards such as the Carnegie Medal, a British children's fiction prize, a virus called Noise means everyone can hear the thoughts of living creatures around them.

"The Noise is a man unfiltered, and without a filter, a man is just chaos walking," says the narrator Todd Hewitt (Holland), a boy forced to run away from his home in Prentisstown – inhabited only by men – after he discovers a patch of Noise-less "silence" in a swamp.

The source of the silence is a girl, Viola Eade (Ridley), with whom Todd embarks on a dangerous journey to find Haven, where they believe there is a cure for Noise. They are pursued by the men of Prentisstown, including the cruel Mayor (Mikkelsen) and his son Davy (Jonas).

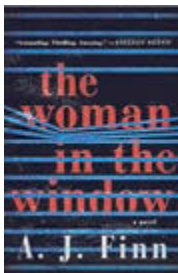
The film, the co-writers for which include Ness and award-winning screenwriter Charlie Kaufman (known for films such as *Adaptation*, 2002, and *Synecdoche, New York*, 2008), originally had a release date of March 1, but reshoots may mean this is pushed back.



Tom Holland and Daisy Ridley filming for *Chaos Walking*.
PHOTO: LIONSGATE

8

THE WOMAN IN THE WINDOW



Movie adapted from: A.J. Finn's 2018 thriller of the same name.
Directed by: Joe Wright
Stars: Amy Adams, Julianne Moore, Gary Oldman
When: Oct 3

Atonement (2007) director Wright helms this thriller, with a screenplay by Pulitzer Prize-winner Tracy Letts, about an agoraphobe who is unable to leave the house due to her psychological condition.

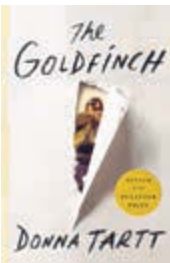
Anna Fox (Adams) is an ex-child psychiatrist now confined to her New York City house, separated from her family and egregiously mixing pills and alcohol. One night, she thinks she witnesses her neighbour's murder – but not only does nobody believe her, the woman she saw might not even exist.

The noirish New York Times bestseller by Finn, a pseudonym for publishing editor Daniel Mallory, was optioned for film by Fox 2000 even before it hit shelves.

It is expected to follow in the footsteps of other runaway "grip lit" successes, such as *Gone Girl* and *The Girl On The Train*, which were adapted for film in 2014 and 2016 respectively.

9

THE GOLDFINCH



What: Movie adapted from Donna Tartt's 2013 novel of the same name.
Directed by: John Crowley
Stars: Ansel Elgort, Aneurin Barnard, Jeffrey Wright
When: October

When Theodore Decker is 13, he loses his mother on a trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art when a terrorist bomb explodes. Dazed, he leaves the scene with one of the Dutch masterpieces on show, Carel Fabritius' *The Goldfinch*.

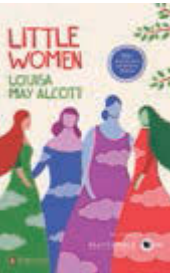
Tartt's 784-page bestseller won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2014 and was lauded to the heavens by some critics while severely panned by others.

The resulting kerfuffle means many eyes are trained on the Warner Bros adaptation, which stars Elgort (*The Fault In Our Stars*, 2014) as Theodore and Barnard as his close friend Boris. A parade of stars such as Wright, Nicole Kidman and Sarah Paulson play the novel's various eccentric characters.

It remains to be seen if the film will be as divisive as its source material.

10

LITTLE WOMEN



What: Movie adapted from Louisa May Alcott's 1868 novel of the same name.
Directed by: Greta Gerwig
Stars: Saoirse Ronan, Emma Watson, Meryl Streep, Laura Dern, Timothee Chalamet
When: Dec 25 in the United States

Gerwig, fresh off last year's Oscar nominations for *Lady Bird*, has assembled a star-studded roster of female talent for this well-loved coming-of-age tale about four teenage sisters living in genteel poverty during the American Civil War.

Headstrong Jo (Ronan), who dreams of becoming a writer, serves as a companion to her wealthy great-aunt (Streep).

Her oldest sister Meg (Watson) manages the household in the absence of their mother Marmee (Dern).

Chalamet plays the sisters' wealthy neighbour and love interest Laurie.

Previous acclaimed adaptations include George Cukor's 1933 film with Katharine Hepburn and Joan Bennett, and the 1994 film with Winona Ryder, Susan Sarandon and Christian Bale.

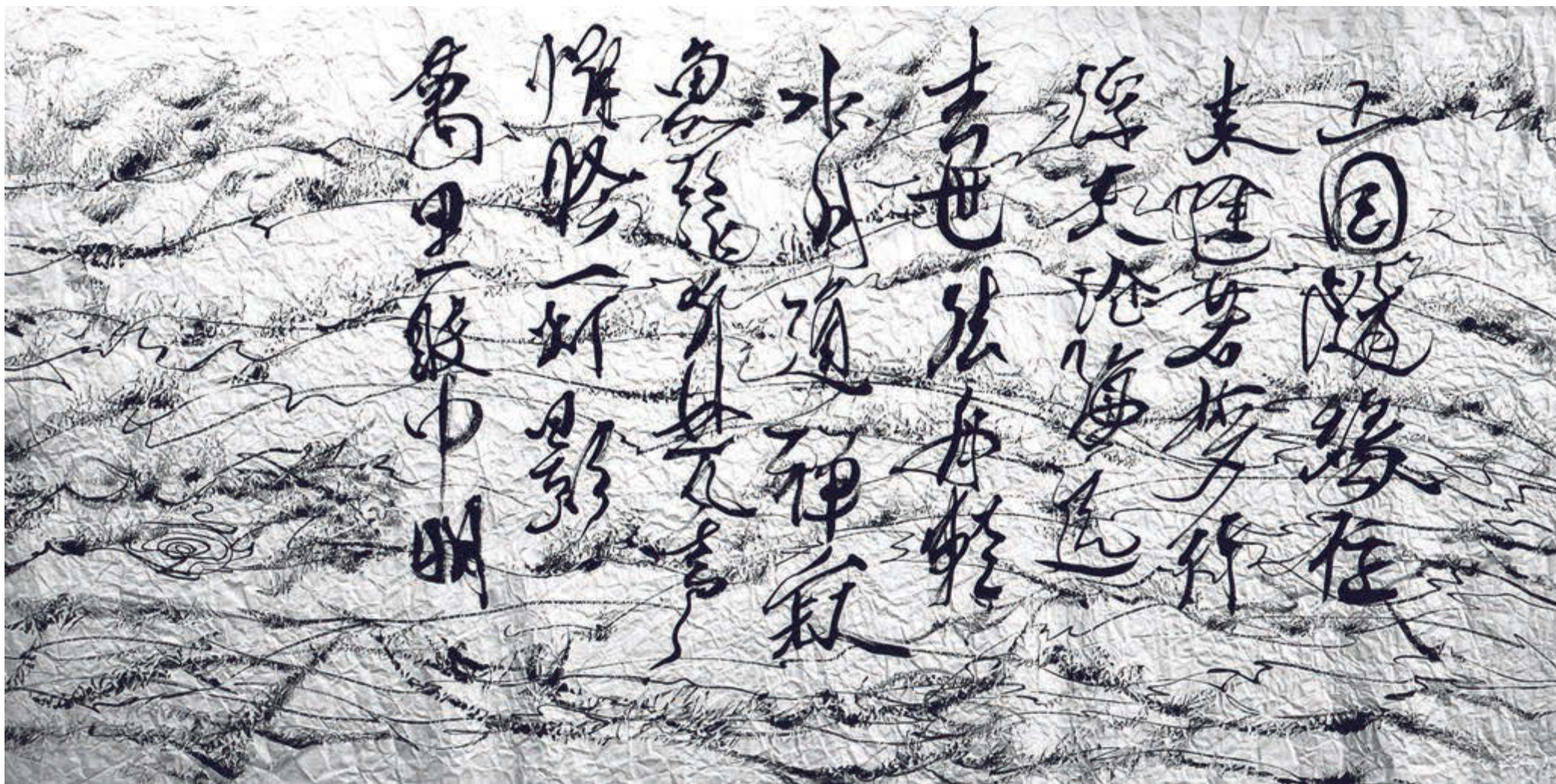
But Gerwig could put a fresh spin on this period drama for a new generation of young women.



Starring in this year's *Little Women* are (from left) Eliza Scanlan, Saoirse Ronan, Emma Watson and Florence Pugh. PHOTO: PATRIOT PICS/BACKGRID

Using art to heal

The works in composer Mark Chan's show allowed him to work through his personal experiences of pain and loss



Japanese Monk Over The Seas by Mark Chan features Tang poet Qian Qi's Seeing A Monk Off To Japan.

Toh Wen Li

Mark Chan is perhaps better known for his work as a singer-songwriter, composer and musical director of theatre productions and arts festivals.

But now, he wants to make his mark as a painter – starting with a showcase of about 50 new works that will be on display at the Esplanade from Jan 18 to the end of March.

Ink Mountain will feature paintings and calligraphy from the past two years, as well as video projections by multimedia artist Brian Gothong Tan.

The show at the Jendela arts space is commissioned by the Esplanade and is held in conjunction with the Singapore bicentennial commemoration this year.

"I'd like this to be a declaration of me stepping onto the art stage as a painter," says Chan.

The 60-year-old's last exhibition was in 1991, when the late dramatist Kuo Pao Kun invited him to show his paintings at The Substation as part of a series of concerts.

In his paintings, as in much of his music, there is a blend of East and West. While most of his vivid, abstract paintings are black Chinese ink on distressed paper – occasionally with flashes of gold and silver – there are also elements that might remind the viewer of works by famous Western painters such as Jackson Pollock, a major figure in the abstract expressionist movement; and Vincent Van Gogh, commonly associated with the post-Impressionist period.

In Chan's works, which also draw on South-east Asian influences, one can make out birds, concentric circles, volcanos and ships. The sea is a recurring theme and nature figures more prominently than mankind.

"There's a lot of sea... garnets plunging into the sea, a volcano next to the sea... When you go anywhere in South-east Asia, the sea is never that far away."

There are also some pieces of Chinese calligraphy featuring Chan's poems, as well as several by Tang poets, such as Qian Qi's Seeing A Monk Off To Japan – a poem about a Japanese monk who travelled to Chang'an to study the sutras, and is now returning to Kyoto.

Chan, who is a self-taught calligrapher and painter in Chinese ink, says his interest in the visual arts began at an early age: When he was a child, he was selected to represent Singapore at the Unicef Child Art Festival, held in conjunction with the Mexico Olympics in 1968.

But he would turn to Chinese brush, ink and paper only in his 20s, when he was due to go to Taipei to meet singers and producers. Unable to read, write or speak much Mandarin, he started attending night classes.

Later, he decided that the best way to learn would be to write out the characters with brush and ink on traditional paper. He fell in love with the medium, and found that the act of using a brush to write out the characters – which could not be covered over – was akin to the act of performing music live.

Painting had always taken a back seat to his music until recently.

In 2015, he returned to Singapore after 14 years of being based abroad.

This was a difficult time: a long-term relationship had ended, and an accident had damaged his left hand and wrist, leaving him unable to play the flute and guitar with the same proficiency as before.

"I took painting up not (just) as an art, but as a daily practice and meditation... I wanted to use it to work

through a lot of pain, breakage and loss," adds Chan, who burns incense before he works, and paints while listening to music ranging from Ravel to Ed Sheeran.

Ink Mountain, he says, is "a very personal exhibition. I've really opened up my heart".

"I want people to enter my world, which is fantastical, yet a heightened reflection of the world as it is."

Music still plays a part in his life. He released a solo album Blue Guitar in 2016, and recently composed the score for the Indian film Painting Life (2018).

The former national swimmer, who admits that he is "interested in everything", has also been working on his debut novel – a work of speculative fiction set in Seville, Shanghai and Singapore.

The works on display at Ink Mountain are all for sale, and will probably cost between \$2,000 and \$9,000 each, Chan says.

Tan, 38, first worked with Chan when he did video work for Chan's contemporary dance production Dreaming Of Kuanyin, Meeting Madonna, presented at the Singapore Arts Festival in 2007.

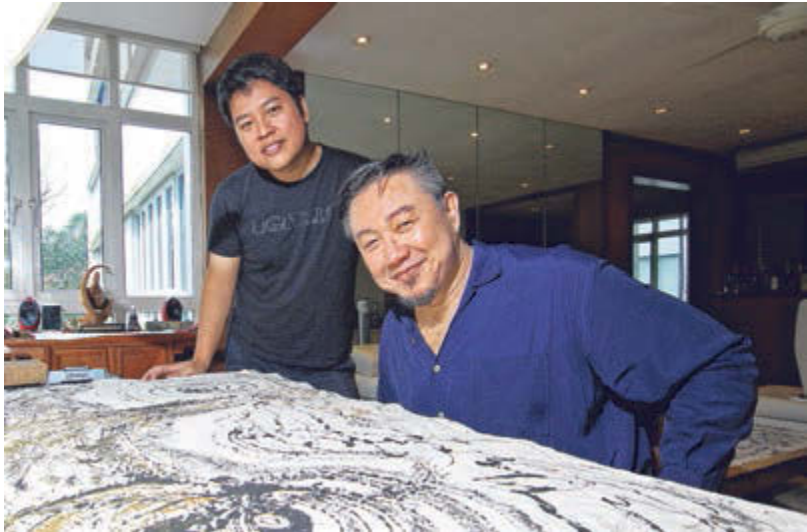
For Ink Mountain, Tan is conceptualising a number of video projections, which are his interpretations of the paintings.

These include animations where the lines of the paintings are set in a swirling motion.

"When I saw (Mark's work), I could relate to it quite strongly. I felt it was very fresh... I could see landscapes, but it was more mindscapes than classical Chinese mountains," says Tan.

"My gut instinct was to animate it – there is so much animation in his work already. I wanted to make it come alive."

tohwenli@sph.com.sg



Mark Chan (right), who is a self-taught calligrapher and painter in Chinese ink, will hold an exhibition showcasing his paintings and calligraphy, as well as video projections by multimedia artist Brian Gothong Tan (left) at the Esplanade.

PHOTOS: BRIAN GOTHONG TAN, JEREMY KWAN

VIEW IT / INK MOUNTAIN

WHERE: Jendela (Visual Arts Space), Level 2, Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, 1 Esplanade Drive

WHEN: Jan 18 to March 31, 11am to 8.30pm (Mondays to Fridays); 10am to 8.30pm (weekends).

There will be a talk, meet-the-artists session, guided walk through the exhibition and a book launch of Ink Mountain – images of selected works from the show, with poetry and writings by Mark Chan – on Jan 26, at 3pm

ADMISSION: Free

INFO: Go to www.facebook.com/markchanartist or call the Esplanade at 6828-8377

Finland's central library welcomes noise

HELSINKI • What do you give the world's most literate country for its 100th birthday?

For Finland's politicians and public, the answer was simple: a vast, state-of-the-art library, a new "living room for the nation".

Twenty years in the planning, Helsinki's central library officially opened on Dec 5 at the end of a year of festivities marking the centenary of Finland's independence after breaking with Russia in 1917 following six centuries under Swedish rule.

It is a huge, flowing structure of wood and glass sitting on a prime spot in the city centre, directly opposite the Finnish parliament.

But whereas the parliament building is an austere and imposing hunk of granite, the new library was designed by Finnish firm ALA Architects as a welcoming, undulating structure, clad in 160km worth of Finnish spruce, drawing people inside with a "warm hug".

Named Oodi – "ode" in Finnish – it is intended as a paean to know-

ledge, learning and equality in what was ranked the world's most literate country by a 2016 report based on official statistics.

While books will feature heavily – 100,000 of them – the cutting-edge facility also boasts studios for music and video production, a cinema, and workshops containing 3D printers and laser cutters, all free of charge for the public.

It will also house a European Union-funded visitor centre, offering information on the 28-member bloc's work and its impact on people's daily lives.

"Oodi gives a new modern idea of what it means to be a library," said Mr Tommi Laitio, Helsinki's executive director of culture and leisure.

"It is a house of literature but it's also a house of technology, it's a house of music, it's a house of cinema, it's a house of the European Union."

"And I think all of these come together to this idea of hope and progress," he said.



Helsinki's new central library Oodi is intended as a paean to knowledge, learning and equality.

PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE- PRESSE

One sign of such progress is the building's fleet of book-carrying robots – small grey wagons which navigate themselves in and out of lifts, avoiding people and furniture, in order to bring returned books up from the basement and drop them off at the correct bookcase.

There, a human member of staff will place the books on the shelf.

Oodi's planners believe the robot librarians are the first instance in the world of self-driving technology being used in this way in a pub-

lic library.

The robots will become a familiar sight to the library's expected 10,000 visitors a day.

Oodi will have areas walled off for quiet studying but, for everywhere else, there will not be a "silence" rule in force, as is common in libraries.

In fact, making a mess and noise are positively encouraged inside the "nerd loft" – a place to inspire people of all ages to come together and create.

Users can build things in work-

shops equipped with cutting-edge tools, borrow musical instruments or play games on consoles.

"We are prepared to constantly have discussions with the users and the staff about what behaviour is welcome in the library, but it's definitely a place of noise and all sorts of improvised activities," Helsinki's head of library services, Ms Katri Vantinen, said.

She is particularly proud of the library's decision not to separate the children's section from the adult

books.

All are housed on the library's panoramic top floor: a sweeping 50m-long space, with glass walls on all sides supporting a billowing, cloud-like roof.

"We think that the noise the children bring into this floor is positive noise, we hear the future, and we enjoy that we have children's and adult literature on the same floor with no walls in between," Ms Vantinen said.

"Acoustics have been planned really well, so even if people are shouting at one end, you can hardly hear them at the other end," she added.

Although many countries have been cutting back on library services, Mr Laitio said there were no problems winning political and public backing for the €98-million (\$154-million) project, thanks to the value that many Finns place on libraries.

About 68 million books a year are borrowed by the country's 5.5 million people, named the happiest in the world by the United Nations last year.

"Libraries in Helsinki are the second highest-rated public service after drinking water," Mr Laitio said.

"So libraries are really loved in Finland. And if I look at this project, a €100-million investment, I hear zero to minimal protest. Actually, people are really joyful and proud." AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



Titled 11, the performance artwork by artist Dawn Ng (left) sees members of the public reading from prepared scripts to one another in "confessional booths". ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

Talk to strangers in the name of art

In artist Dawn Ng's performance art piece, 22 strangers will re-enact different dialogues with different people

Toh Wen Li

A Grab driver and his passenger are in the middle of a conversation.

The young man, back in Singapore from the United States where he is based, says he feels nostalgic about his home town.

The driver replies: "I don't understand you young people nowadays. Not even 30 years old, already last time this, last time that. You're supposed to be about the future, but you are always looking back."

This is a snippet from one of 11 dialogues that will take place at the Telok Ayer Arts Club as part of a new performance artwork by Singapore artist Dawn Ng, 36, which runs on Jan 17, 24 and 31 and Feb 14.

Twenty-two members of the public will sit on opposite ends of 11 "confessional booths", which are arranged in a circle.

Each pair has three minutes to read from a script Ng has written before they move on – one person clockwise, the other anticlockwise – to re-enact a different dialogue with a different stranger.

These range from the everyday to the fantastical; from a conversation with Apple's Siri virtual assistant to two children talking about a tooth fairy.

"Because the participants are strangers, I wanted to push them

into the deep end of the fictional relationships I created," says Ng, the artist behind Walter, a huge white rabbit that has popped up in places such as the lawn of the Singapore Art Museum, Housing Board estates and the MAC Lyon museum of contemporary arts in France.

"For example, you could be getting a divorce from a person, who in reality, you just met. I want audiences to be able to access their emotions instantly and challenge their capacity for empathy for the characters they play and the others they encounter."

The title of the show is 11.

Ng explains: "The two ones mirror each other, yet stand as two parallel lines that never meet."

BOOK IT / 11

WHERE: Telok Ayer Arts Club, 2 McCallum Street

WHEN: Jan 17, 24 and 31 and Feb 14, 8pm

ADMISSION: \$48, including a cocktail

INFO: E-mail contactus@telokayerartsclub.sg to buy tickets

"11 visually reflects what this social experiment is about – two individuals sharing a binding story or emotion for a brief moment, then moving on."

Inspiration came when she was wrapping up production for her solo exhibition Perfect Stranger at Sullivan + Strumpf gallery in Sydney last year. That project, which comprises 61 text prints, was first displayed at Chan + Hori Contemporary in Gillman Barracks.

It was born out of a year's worth of daily responses to questions from a psychologist she had recently met.

"I find the acute honesty between two people who don't know each other moving," says Ng, whose work can be found at United Overseas Bank and in the Singapore Art Museum's permanent collection.

The upcoming show – part-performance art, part-social experiment – recalls the practice of speed dating, although Ng, who is married to Mr Wee Teng Wen, co-founder of hospitality company The Lo & Behold Group, says she is not drawing from first-hand experience.

What does she hope it will achieve?

"That everyone will feel something. And maybe someone might even fall in love with a stranger."

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Review

Satire on Xi Jinping's China vision

FICTION

CHINA DREAM

By Ma Jian

Vintage Publishing/Hardcover/
178 pages/ \$26.95/★★★★☆

Seow Bei Yi

Chinese provincial official Ma Daode, whose given name translates to "morality", heads a new China Dream Bureau, which aims to ensure Chinese President Xi Jinping's vision of national rejuvenation enters the brain of every resident in his city.

Ma, who grew up in a revolution that killed millions, dreams of having a device that will lead his countrymen into the future – by washing out their private memories in favour of collective beliefs.

Set in present-day China, some time after Mr Xi becomes President in 2013, the novel is a satirical take on reality, peppered with references to the fervour surrounding the nation's top man. In one instance, after Mr Xi visits a dumpling eatery, officials come up with a ballet re-enactment of the event.

The novel centres on the life of Ma, who is embroiled in power struggles at work and has numerous affairs with young mistresses. His stash of gifts – thinly disguised bribes – is ever-growing.

But despite his success, he is haunted by memories of his youth.

As a young man during the Cultural Revolution, he had distanced himself from his father, the former



Ziyang county chief, who was condemned as an "evil rightist".

The more he tries to forget the cruelty he allowed his parents to experience, the more vivid his recollections become. Yet, there is nowhere he can grieve, for their bodies lie with countless others, in a grove where a solitary willow now stands.

Ma's China Dream Device, a neural implant, does not see the light of day. What readers see instead is a man's downward spiral on a path of self-destruction.

Author Ma Jian, whose novels have been banned in China for examining politically sensitive topics, including the 1989 Tiananmen student uprising, offers here another commentary on the brutality of the Cultural Revolution and what he calls in his foreword the "false utopias" that have "infantilised" the country.



China Dream

(above) by

Ma Jian (top)

is set in

present-day

China. PHOTOS:

FLORA DREW,

VINTAGE PUBLISHING

By weaving scenes from the protagonist's past and present together in a dizzying display, the author appears to liken – rather than contrast – Mr Xi's regime to the late Chinese leader Mao Zedong's, suggesting Mr Xi is no less of a dictator attempting to whitewash the darker side of China's history.

The author also casts the spotlight on a public official and his state of mind, pointing to what appears to be rot in a system that continues to try cultivating an unquestioning public – in the name of a greater good.

While readers may be tempted to write off Ma Daode as a villain, the author's deep dive into his psyche and how he came to be lends nuance to his character.

One wishes the book gave a similar treatment to its characterisation of women, who seem to exist for Ma's sexual gratification or as an attempt to add depth to his personality. It is through text conversations with his mistresses that Ma's literary interests and talents are revealed.

While provocative in small doses, the hypersexualisation here dampens the artistry of an otherwise hard-hitting commentary.

If you like this, read: Serve The People! by Yan Lianke (Black Cat, 2008, \$21.71, Books Kinokuniya), which is set in the Cultural Revolution and about a commander's wife and her young lover, who become aroused after smashing statues of Mao Zedong and urinating on his books.



ST PHOTO: ERNEST LUIS

A library on fire, haunting by a woman in black

Join Life reporters Toh Wen Li and Olivia Ho (both above) in this new monthly podcast by The Straits Times, in which they talk about books in the headlines and recommend new reads.

In this episode, they chat about The Library Book by Susan Orlean, an investigation into the 1986 Los Angeles Public Library fire and a love letter to libraries everywhere; and Melmoth by Sarah Perry, a neo-Gothic novel in which the guilty are haunted through history by a woman in black.

Produced by: Olivia Ho, Toh Wen Li and Ernest Luis

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Taking the toy piano seriously

The small but musically powerful instrument will take the spotlight in two concerts this month

Akshita Nanda
Arts Correspondent

Think the toy piano is just for children to play with? Think again.

Two concerts by professional musicians this month put the small but musically powerful instrument in the spotlight.

Two new works for toy piano written by 20something Singaporean musicians Yuting Tan and Jun An Chew will premiere in Play-Play: A Toy/Piano Concert at the Esplanade Recital Studio on Saturday.

The pieces will be performed by Singaporean musician Gu Wei, alongside Chinese musician Huizi Zhang on the piano.

On Jan 26, Singapore-born Margaret Leng Tan, hailed as the pioneer of toy piano performances, plays from her repertoire and talks about her artistry in TOY! TOY! TOY! at The Ngee Ann Kongsi Auditorium in the National Gallery Singapore.

The lecture-performance is held alongside the ongoing Minimalism: Space. Light. Object. exhibition at the gallery, which focuses on the influential movement that has shaped visual arts, music and lifestyle.

In line with the exhibition, the artist plays a marathon survey of Minimalist music during the Minimalism Redux concerts on Jan 23 and 24 at the gallery.

The concert begins with music by her mentor, the late American composer John Cage, hailed as a pioneer of Minimalism in music.

Tan performed Cage's Suite For Toy Piano at a memorial tribute for him at the Lincoln Centre in New York in 1993. Her critically acclaimed albums – The Art Of The Toy Piano (1997) and She Herself Alone: The Art Of The Toy Piano 2 (2010) – helped the toy piano capture popular attention.

The child-sized toy piano looks like a piano, but is closer in sound to a percussion instrument like the German glockenspiel.

A piano has strings, a toy piano uses metal rods to emit sound and does not have pedals.

The instrument is surprisingly versatile, says 27-year-old Gu. "It's not what many people expect. It still sounds like a toy, but its potential goes beyond it."

He paid about US\$200 (S\$270) for his 37-key toy piano made by American company Schoenhut.

The instrument is slightly larger than a check-in suitcase. He brought it over from Baltimore, where he is doing his doctorate in composition



at the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University.

Though aware of the avant-garde performances of Tan, Gu was introduced to the toy piano only two years ago, through composer David Smooke, his professor at Peabody.

Gu saw Smooke's toy piano in the latter's office and borrowed it to include in his 2016 performance for flexible instruments – including the sewing machine – titled 3.25pm. He loved the sound.

He says: "It can be very serious depending on the music, but how I use it is for music that's substantial, but with a bit of comic effect."

His concert on Saturday does not include 3.25pm, but it will feature Carousell, a work by American composer Phyllis Chen for toy piano and musical box.

Chen also wrote Curios, a 2015 work for toy piano and toy instruments which celebrated the bizarre world of the circus and was created for Tan, who premiered it at the Singapore International Festival of Arts that year.

The New York-based artist, now 73, will play the percussion movements from Curios during her Minimalism Redux concerts at the National Gallery Singapore.

She has received Singapore's highest arts honour – the Cultural Medallion – and her artistry has partly



inspired the two 20something composers featured in Saturday's concert. Both acknowledge her ground-breaking work.

Chew, whose I Know What Stars To Follow Home is a 10-minute piece for toy piano and live electronics, says: "In later work, I'd like to expand the playful elements of the toy piano – maybe pair it with other toys."

Free Recall by Yuting Tan is an eight-minute piece based on childhood memories, including the rhythms and gestures of hand-clapping games. The 25-year-old did not play with the toy piano as a child, but says she cannot resist it as an adult.

"When I pass by shops selling toy pianos, I just can't help going in and playing with it," she says. "It's very charming and cute, and you just want to hear what sounds it makes."

Margaret Leng Tan compares the toy piano to Singapore. "It's small, but powerful," she says.

She is delighted to hear about younger Singaporean musicians taking up the toy piano "and running with it".

"I love it, they're being so creative," she says. "It's all part of my legacy. The toy piano is alive."

akshitan@sph.com.sg

The two musicians holding concerts using the toy piano are Singapore-born Margaret Leng Tan (above, in a 1993 performance) and Singaporean musician Gu Wei (left). PHOTOS: COURTESY OF MARGARET LENG TAN AND JACK VARTOOGIAN, PEABODY INSTITUTE

BOOK IT / PLAY-PLAY: A TOY/PIANO CONCERT

WHERE: Esplanade Recital Studio, 1 Esplanade Drive

WHEN: Saturday, 7.30pm

ADMISSION: \$25 from play-play.peatix.com

VIEW IT / MINIMALISM REDUX BY MARGARET LENG TAN

WHERE: The Ngee Ann Kongsi Auditorium, National Gallery Singapore, 1 St Andrew's Road

WHEN: Jan 23 and 24, 7.30pm

ADMISSION: Free, but register at bit.ly/2SYNLS

TOY TOY TOY! TOY PIANO PERFORMANCE AND TALK BY MARGARET LENG TAN

WHERE: The Ngee Ann Kongsi Auditorium

WHEN: Jan 26, 3pm

ADMISSION: Free, but register at bit.ly/2S9ml8R

Review

Poetry fired up with wit and wanton inspiration

POETRY

THE FLAME

By Leonard Cohen
Canongate Books/Hardback/
278 pages/\$40.46/Books Kinokuniya
★★★★☆

Yeow Kai Chai

There are two ways of approaching this book – either as an insufferable poetry purist or as an unabashed fan of the munificent lyrical gifts Leonard Cohen has given the world. I chose the latter.

The Flame, the last volume of poems he worked on assiduously in his final months, is an ode to the power of words to seduce, probe and get under one's skin.

It is lit with wit and warmth, lust and wanton inspiration, the many fires that have kindled man's best and worst instincts.

Before he died of leukaemia at the age of 82 in November 2016, Cohen had just released his 14th and final album You Want It Darker, whose lyrics revealed his awareness that his days were numbered.

In Leaving The Table, he said it plainly: "I'm out of the game/I don't know the people/In your picture frame."

These words are contained alongside those of his other three recent releases, in a generous compendium comprising unpublished

works chosen by Cohen himself, as well as a scattering of sometimes unwarranted notebook entries, drawings, e-mail exchanges and even an acceptance speech he gave in Spain for a literary award.

The picture emerging from these pages, put together by his editors, Professors Robert Faggen and Alexandra Pleshoyano, is an ambivalent one.

For naysayers, he may be less a poet, but for many of his devotees, Cohen is more than just a musician, closer to being a soothsayer who proffered truths, hard and scabrous, in the most mellifluous ways.

His words are often distilled to the simplest. This does not mean they are simplistic.

Take in his lines, scratch your head, weep, laugh – sometimes at the same time.

In the poem Happens To The Heart, the rhyme in "art" and "Marx" is a hoot: "I was always working steady/But I never call it art/I was funding my depression/Meeting Jesus reading Marx."

It is a meta-textual riff on the lionised artist and the romantic halo around him.

Cohen is at once the epitome of the artist who lives and breathes art, as well as being its best rebuke. Ordained a Zen monk who studied meditation in 1994, he understands the bathos underlining the life of such a pursuit.



Leonard Cohen's (left) The Flame (above) is an ode to the power of words to seduce, probe and get under one's skin. PHOTOS: OLD+IDEAS

You may point out, too, the hilariously b***hing poem Kanye West Is Not Picasso. It is a game of bragadocio where he declares that he himself is "the Kanye West of Kanye West/The Kanye West/Of the great bogus shift of bullshit** culture".

In a surrealist piece called Undertow, he describes how he was "caught in the grip/Of the undertow/And ditched on a beach...With a child in my arms/And a chill in my soul/And my heart the

shape/Of a begging bowl".

What is the tone of the piece? Sad? Funny? Tragicomic? Is the poem satirising the black comedy called Life and its string of twists and turns? In such cavalier moments, you miss his impish wisdom.

If you like this, read: Stranger Music by Leonard Cohen (Vintage Books, 1994, \$26.29, Books Kinokuniya), a collection of his poems and song lyrics which showcases his accomplished early works.

Bestsellers

FICTION

- (1) The Next Person You Meet In Heaven by Mitch Albom
- (2) The Travelling Cat Chronicles by Hiro Arikawa
- (4) Crazy Rich Asians by Kevin Kwan
- (3) Rich People Problems by Kevin Kwan
- (6) China Rich Girlfriend by Kevin Kwan
- (5) Past Tense by Lee Child
- (-) Milkman by Anna Burns
- (7) Fire And Blood by George R.R. Martin
- (9) Tuesdays With Morrie by Mitch Albom
- (-) Legends Of The Condor Heroes #1: A Hero Born by Jin Yong

NON-FICTION

- (1) Becoming by Michelle Obama
- (2) The Subtle Art Of Not Giving A F**ck by Mark Manson
- (5) This Is What Inequality Looks Like by Teo You Yenn
- (3) Tall Order by Peh Shing Hwei
- (4) Billion Dollar Whale by Tom Wright and Bradley Hope
- (6) 21 Lessons For The 21st Century by Yuval Noah Harari
- (9) Sapiens: A Brief History Of Humankind by Yuval Noah Harari
- (8) The Art Of Thinking Clearly by Rolf Dobelli
- (7) Brief Answers To The Big Questions by Stephen Hawking
- (-) Ikigai by Hector Garcia and Francesc Miralles

CHILDREN'S

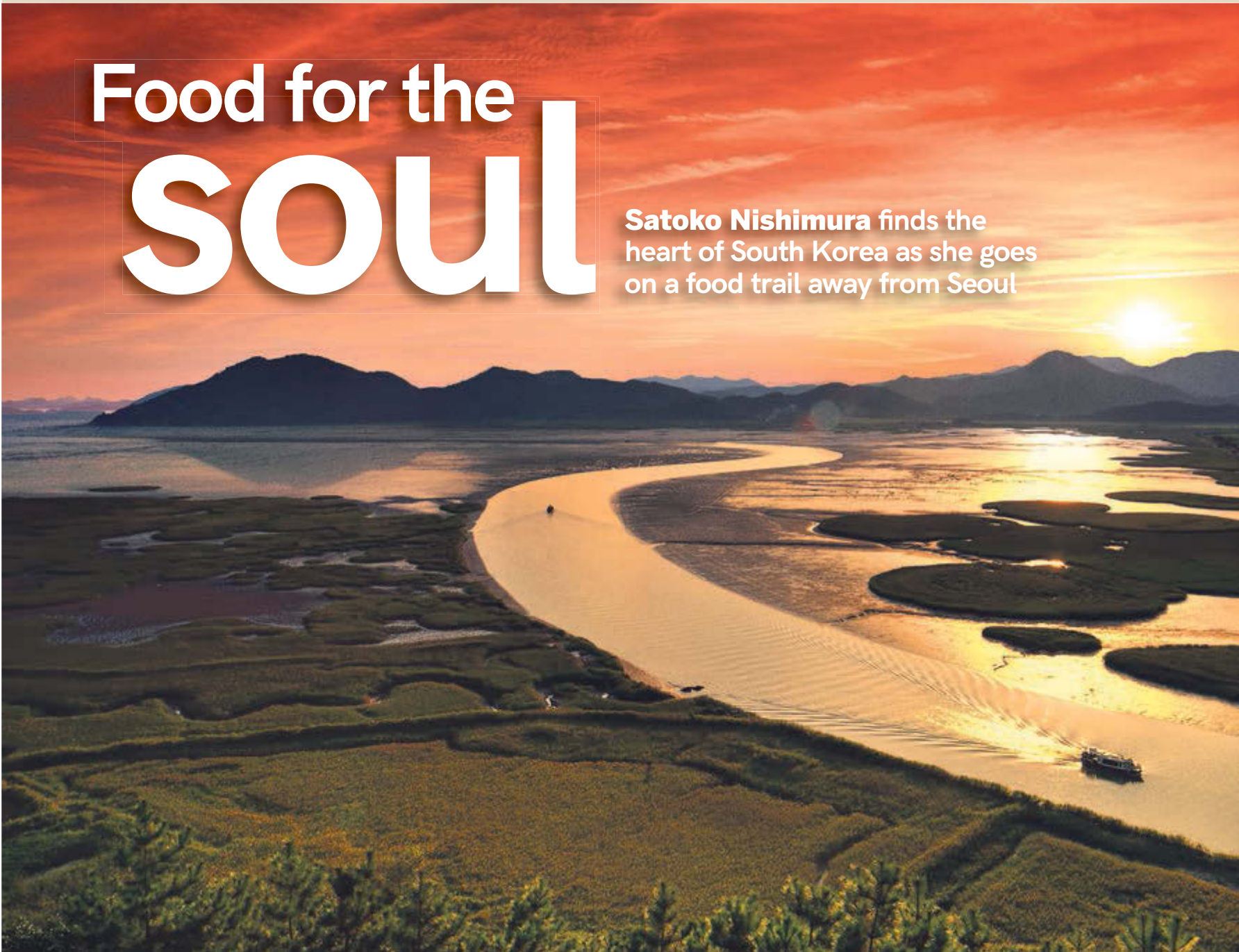
- (1) Diary Of A Wimpy Kid: The Meltdown by Jeff Kinney
- (2) Dog Man #5: Lord Of The Fleas by Dav Pilkey
- (3) Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes Of Grindelwald – The Original Screenplay by J.K. Rowling
- (4) The Ice Monster by David Walliams
- (5) Dork Diaries #13: Tales From A Not-So-Happy Birthday by Rachel Renee Russell
- (9) Dog Man #4: Dog Man And Cat Kid by Dav Pilkey
- (7) The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupery
- (-) Geronimo Stilton #70: The Phantom Bandit by Geronimo Stilton
- (-) Roblox Top Adventure Games by Egmont
- (8) Disney Wreck-It Ralph 2 by Bonnier

• This is The Straits Times' compilation of bestseller lists from Books Kinokuniya, Times, WHSmith and Popular bookstores.

A travel series every Tuesday.
The stories are also available in sgtravellers.com



BON VOYAGE



Food for the soul

Satoko Nishimura finds the heart of South Korea as she goes on a food trail away from Seoul



Suncheon Bay Wetland is registered under UNESCO as a biosphere reserve.

PHOTOS: SATOKO NISHIMURA, KOREA TOURISM ORGANIZATION

Suspend, for a moment, your perception of South Korea as the land of K-Pop, Psy and aesthetic beauty.

Venture beyond the bright lights and beautiful people of Seoul and you will discover, as I did, delights that would thrill the most finicky of foodies.

The culinary adventure can be found 300km south of Seoul, in the agricultural region of Jeolla-do province. There, discover authenticity — real Korean cuisine infused with a rich rural culture that has long been the secret of locals.

Until now.

Day 1: First rule: "No rules"

Forget Gangnam, take me to Gunsan, a two-hour ride south from Incheon Airport. Gunsan means "lots of mountains".

Framed by two rivers in the North and South, and the Yellow Sea to its West, Gunsan's fishing boats and vegetable farms hint of its tantalising treasures.

Most of all, it is known for its exotic blue crab, fresh from the coastal waters off this bay city.

Even the customary complimentary side dishes that is the signature of a Korean meal is special — all 10 to 20 of them, putting the paltry appetisers of Singapore's Korean offerings at food courts to shame.



Raw crab marinated in soya sauce goes well with beer and soju mix.

Where to start? Is there a procedure? Everything looked so good, including the fresh vegetable leaves, each the size of an adult's palm.

"I should have read the Korean table manner book in advance!" (My embarrassed inner voice screamed).

Accustomed to Japanese cuisine with its meticulous customs, I was aghast. "No rule, all up to you!" came the friendly advice from the locals.

No rules meant the freedom to choose your preferred ingredients to be wrapped in a leaf and compare notes with fellow diners.

The main dish was the signature "raw crab". Suck the chewy meat from the milky white crab shell and your taste buds will be rewarded with a flavour utterly unique, even for one raised on tons of raw fish.

The slightly salty taste goes well with the Korean beer cocktail made with soju (Korean Shochu) and beer. I was smitten.

The verdict: No rule, *lotsa* of drool.

Day 2: Secret of longevity and glowy skin

Beautiful clear blue skies provide a perfect contrast to the red balloons and banners at Suncheon's annual Fermented Soybean Festival.

Sunchang villagers are known for living long lives. Could this longevity be due to its famous Gochujang hot pepper paste? Gochujang is a savoury, sweet and yet spicy paste which, when first produced in 1392, could only be enjoyed by emperors and a privileged few.

It is made from water, salt, glutinous rice (mochi) powder, barley syrup, chilli powder and dried fermented soybean powder.

I joined a 20-minute Suncheon Gochujang



72-year-old Mdm Kang taught us how to make Gochujang from a recipe passed down from her parents in a 20-minute class.

making class conducted by 72-year-old Mdm Kang Sun Ok, one of the country's celebrity Gochujang masters.

"Stir the paste till bubbles come out," boomed the third-generation master. "Cool the paste, or the malted yeast will be killed by warm temperature."

It was tiring work. But the master, her face glowing in her satin white traditional Hanbok dress, seemed unfazed. "My secret to good health is to eat vegetables, not so much meat," she said.

After the hard work, you would expect to be rewarded with a taste of your own Gochujang. But it must "sleep" in the vase for at least a few months to be fermented first.

Nevertheless, I enjoyed meals with more Kimchi and Gochujang — and my favourite, Ssamjang (Soybean and Gochujang).

Day 3: What to say when you like something in South Korea

"Choayo!" (pronounced choo-ah-yo).

It was in Namwon city where I found myself exclaiming "Choayo!" at every meal.

Namwon is known as the City of Love because among Korean folktales, a temple here tells a story similar to that of Cinderella.

The story goes that Mongryong, a handsome and intelligent 16-year-old government official fell in love with Chunhyang, a female entertainer, also 16. After overcoming many complex obstacles, their story ends with a happy-ever-after.

You can visit the temple mentioned in the tale. The culinary offering is straightforward: Loach soup or black pork BBQ stalls are everywhere.

Loach thrives in the clean rice paddies. The famous black pig, native to Korea, is also raised in Jirisan.

Mr Kim, our "Choayo" (this word can be used for nice people, too) driver, says he has been waiting for this loach soup ever since we left Seoul.

The soup has a deep Miso flavour. It has lots of tiny soft bones of the loach which needs getting used to. There is also fried loach, which goes quite well with local Makgeolli alcohol.

Whether Jirisan's Cinderella favoured the loach remains a mystery.



Die-die-must-try loach soup (about \$S11) in Namwon city.

Day 4: Story of hope and natural medicine

"Just yesterday, one bird finally came back from Russia after a year," declared a Suncheon Bay Wetland Reserve officer, looking pleased. "Well, it's already past 5pm and we must hurry so that we don't miss the sunset."

We rushed to the large S-shaped waterway. This 3.5km-long Unesco world heritage bay site boasts the best sunset view in the country.

Take your eyes off the sunset and you will spot small grayish crabs hiding in the muddy holes at the roots of the thick yellow reeds.

Crab? Check. But no sign of migratory bird. "About 2,500 birds including hooded cranes fly here to survive the winter. We hope they will come soon."

Perhaps to console us, the officer offered a cup of hot tea, made with boiled root and the underground stem of Suncheon reeds. It works as herbal medicine to aid digestion.

The simple grassy taste reminds me of my grandma's tea made from unknown herbs, which I was not able to buy from supermarkets. I miss her.

Day 5: Meet the abalone millionaire who caught the wave

So I'm finally at Wando Island, on the Southern edge of South Korea, one of 250 islands facing the Korea Strait.

Expect the best grilled fish at any of the local eateries on the island, which is about the size of the eastern region of Singapore.

But make a beeline for abalone, the world's most expensive shellfish. Eighty per cent of the abalone in Korea comes from the clear, clean waters off this island. Some are exported to Singapore.

"Come and join the abalone farm tour", said Mr Oh Ji Su (below), a young, tall abalone farm owner, as he handed out life jackets for the boat trip to the site.

"When I was a child, this island was only known for its beautiful coast and seaweed. Two decades ago, some started growing abalone which eats seaweed."



Live abalones are just like snails, but they take three years to be of a marketable size.

He worked for a construction company after graduating from estate management school in Seoul. But four years ago, he got into the abalone business as a farmer when he saw the potential to earn more.

From 1,000 abalones, the 36-year-old now owns about 100,000 pieces. He is now a millionaire and boss to 17 workers.

But his story is not Gangnam-style. "Abalone needs two to three years to grow till it reaches a marketable size," he said.

The abalone farm tour comes with three pieces of fresh live abalones (they really look like snails), and you can eat them grilled or as sashimi.

I had them grilled and they were super chewy and crunchy.

Three pieces is about S\$12 (KRW10,000), which is a steal compared to S\$40 for a can of two in Singapore.

Day 6: A fruity dessert after good spicy meals

Finally, dessert. The city is well known for the Naju Pear, a huge round juicy fruit which is available in autumn.

The Asian pear is my favourite fruit and this is heavenly.

At around S\$20 (KRW15,000 to 20,000), you can join the pear picking tour at the local pear farm.

I picked three large pears, each about 15cm in diameter and weighing about 800g.

The verdict: Juicy, crunchy with an clean, sweet flavour. Its huge size means you can share it at least with eight people.

When night fell, we were guided to a local gourmet restaurant for beef bone soup (Gom-tang), another "must-eat" in Naju city.

I fell in love with it after just three sips of it. The bone broth is rich in minerals and collagen and is said to contribute to weight loss and have natural body healing power.

Day 7: May the Kimchi be with you

On the way back to Seoul, we dropped by a new tourist attraction, Damyang Bamboo forest, where you can enjoy a 2km-long walk among the bamboos. Each of the eight paths feature a unique theme, such as "Zombie walk" and "best friend walk".



Such creative ideas to present food and wine using bamboo tree.

A feeling of peace and serenity fills my soul. Maybe this is because of my grandma's belief that bamboo forests are safe havens during earthquakes as the roots are connected to one another, securing the trees to the ground.

Surrounded by bamboo trees, it was the perfect place to try my first taste of bamboo rice and Bamboo leaf wine.

All in, the agricultural region of Jeolla-do lives up to the promise of distinctive, fresh dishes.

While Seoul pulsates with activity and the pizzazz of Gangnam, the small towns of Jeolla-do offers the essence of Korean cuisine, fresh off the sea or farm, and unbeatable charm.

Or, as they say in Jeolla-do, *Choayo!*

Trip is made possible by Korea Tourism Organization, Jeollabuk-do Province & Jeollanam-do Province.

Dubai: A holiday destination for the whole family

Discover a wide range of exciting activities in this desert oasis

BY LI YIMING

Does a family holiday to Dubai sound unusual to you?

Many Singaporeans have the misconception that this city in the United Arab Emirates, home to swanky shopping malls and the famous Burj Khalifa, is a playground only for high net worth individuals.

But everyone can have a good time without breaking the bank at this safe, family-friendly destination. According to global data crowdsourcing website Numbeo, the city is ranked among the safest in the world, with falling crime rates.

And thanks to hotel shuttle services and a good network of bus, tram and bicycle routes, getting around Dubai is easy. Some hotels are also conveniently located near the city's metro stations, where each train has a dedicated carriage for women and children.

Here are some activities and attractions to consider:

Visit exciting entertainment zones

A great time to visit any time of the year, you will be battling villains like an Avenger and exploring the jungles of the Lost Valley at the world's largest indoor theme park, IMG Worlds of Adventure.

Check out Marvel-themed rides like Avengers: Battle of Ultron and fight Ultron alongside Iron Man, Thor, Black Widow, Hawkeye, Captain America and the Hulk.

Other options include Ben 10 5D Hero Time — a 5D multi-sensory theatre experience featuring a 10-minute movie, and The Haunted Hotel — where a maze of corridors and creepy characters promise ghoulish fun. These are spread across five adventure zones — Marvel, Cartoon Network, Lost Valley - Dinosaur Adventure, IMG Boulevard and Novo Cinemas — each with its own retail and dining options.

Dine at Spice Valley, an Indian-inspired buffet-style restaurant, or savour authentic Chinese cuisine at Chang's Golden Dragon. Kids will love CN Feast, where they can take photos with Cartoon Network characters while enjoying international cuisine.

No time for a sit-down meal? Grab a quick bite from the nearest food kiosk, such as Churro & Pretzel Station, Popcorn Factory and Waffles On Wheels.

For a different kind of experience, visit Dubai Parks and Resorts — the one-stop entertainment destination for everyone with its three unique theme parks, a water park and a waterfront hub for shopping, dining and entertainment.

LEGOLAND Water Park is designed for children aged two to 12, and home to six play areas and more than 40 Lego-themed rides, shows and experiences.

At MOTIONGATE Dubai, the region's largest Hollywood-inspired theme park, rides and attractions are centred around Hollywood's biggest studios such as DreamWorks Animation, Lionsgate and Columbia Pictures.

And at Dubai Riverland, explore the alfresco dining and shopping district and Lapita Hotel, a Polynesian-themed resort. This free recreational hub with unique entertainment options provides varied experiences at The India Gate, French Village, Boardwalk and The Peninsula.

Have fun in the sun

Outdoorsy types will enjoy the city's stunning beaches, especially between November and April. In the peak of winter, temperatures are around 20 deg C in the day, and can drop to as low as 15 deg C at night.

Visit La Mer beach district, which features wide, open spaces with palm tree-lined boulevards, graffiti murals and laidback charm.

Water park lovers, don't miss the Laguna Waterpark's four zones — Splash, Slide, Surf and Relax — offering rides like The Manta and AquaDrop to get hearts racing. Alternatively, float down the lazy river in a rubber ring.

On dry land, kids will go crazy for inflatable playground Hawa Hawa. This concept from Japan boasts two dunes and seven peaks, where over adults can bounce for hours.



Explore new cultures

Families should also experience Dubai's awe-inspiring blend of history, geography and culture with trips to the city outskirts.

A little over an hour away from central Dubai is Hatta, located in the Hajar Mountains. At this emerging eco-tourism destination, you can mountain bike, kayak or explore the heritage village. Go on a desert safari to the Arabian Desert to ride a camel, and try ATV riding, dune driving or sandboarding.

To learn more about local culture, visit the Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding (SMCCU). Located at the Al Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood along Dubai Creek, SMCCU conducts tours to Jumeirah Mosque and the Bastakia Quarter, where buildings date back to the 1890s. Enjoy a traditional homemade breakfast there, or lunch on local dishes as you learn about the region's tradition and culture.

Then cross the creek on an abra, a motorised water taxi. It is the cheapest way to travel between Deira and Bur Dubai at approximately \$S0.40, where you can shop



Clockwise from above: Global Village, featuring 27 pavilions representing 75 countries; make a splash at LEGOLAND Water Park; shopping for fabric at a traditional market (souq); Zabeel House, your home away from home.

PHOTOS: TOURISM DUBAI

at traditional markets known as souqs.

In Deira, visit the Gold Souq for the biggest selection of gold jewellery and gemstones, and the Spice Souq, where almost every spice and herb is available. Marked by narrow alleys, wooden arches and Arabesque lanterns, the market also sells oud wood perfumes, nuts and dried fruits, and souvenirs such as pashminas and embroidered artefacts.

At Bur Dubai, visit the Old Souq (also known as Textile Souq or Bur Dubai Souq), for fabrics, clothes, footwear and souvenirs. Many tailors can also be found here.

All-in-one venues

Dubai's shopping malls offer a wide range of activities, attracting holidaymakers from around the world, especially during the annual Dubai Shopping Festival. This year's festival runs from now till Feb 2.

At Dubai Mall, Mum can go shopping while Dad can dive with sharks at the Dubai Aquarium and Underwater Zoo. The kids can experience mind-bending fun at virtual reality and augmented reality attraction VR Park, propelling down the side of Burj Khalifa or dune-driving. Later, the whole family can set sail on the Burj Lake and enjoy the world's largest performing fountain show.

Aside from indoor malls, there is Global Village, an annual multi-cultural extravaganza featuring 27 pavilions representing 75 countries. Expect cultural performances and craft-making activities, and shop for souvenirs such as homemade Labneh cheese, olives and ornate jewellery from Lebanon; Saudi dates from Medinat and Qassim; 15 types of honey from Abha and Tayef regions; the famous spices of Yemen; and intricate artefacts hand-carved from mahogany, rosewood and soapstone.

Other highlights include Carnaval — a fun fair with a 60m-high Ferris wheel, a fiery fountain show and about 120 themed food kiosks featuring popular street food. It runs till April 6.

A smorgasbord of yummy food

Dubai is a food haven of delights — many unavailable in Singapore — at a wide range of prices. The variety ensures that little picky eaters will not go hungry.

Check out Sikka Café for Indian and Persian fare such as Khameer bread sandwiches, soups and a selection of mezze, or high-end restaurant Al Nafoora in Jumeirah Zabeel Saray for Lebanese food from mezze to mixed grilled meats.

For mid-range offerings, contemporary Emirati restaurant Seven Sands dishes up culinary delights from across the seven emirates, so you can sample thereof (a rich stew of meat with slow-roasted veggies) and khabeesa (a dessert made with roasted flour, sugar, ground cardamom, rose water and saffron). For something familiar, try stir-fries and dim sum at modern Chinese restaurant New Shanghai, and Western food from Shake Shack (try the egg and cheese burger) and Texas Roadhouse (order hearty steaks and ribs).

On a smaller budget, sample exotic Yemeni cuisine at Al Marhabani — specifically mandi and haneeth. Mandi is a signature dish of rice, meat and spices, while haneeth, a dish of flavourful and tender veal, is said to be one of the oldest traditional dishes in the world. Other wallet-friendly options include Asian fare congee and nasi goreng at Noodle Bowl.

Visit www.visitdubai.com for more.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR EVERY BUDGET

BEST SPURGE:

Jumeirah Al Qasr, featuring 29 low-rise dual-level summer houses, round-the-clock butler service and Sinbad Kids Club, featuring play areas and pools and activities such as face painting. Rooms for two adults and two children cost about \$S785 a night in March.

RESORT-STYLE STAYS:

Atlantis, The Palm, an underwater-themed family resort where you can swim with dolphins and enjoy aquarium experiences. Atlantis Kids Club runs a full schedule of activities for children aged between three and 12. Rooms for two adults and two children cost about \$S1,534 a night in March.

VALUE-FOR-MONEY BUDGET:

Zabeel House, easily accessible to the metro and some of the city's best beaches. Hotel facilities include a free children's club. Rooms for two adults and two children cost about \$S177 in March.

BEST ACCESS TO LIFESTYLE OPTIONS:

MOE Sheraton, near downtown Dubai and Media City and Jumeirah Beach. The hotel is linked to the Mall of the Emirates, home to Dubai Miracle Garden and Dinosaur Park. Rooms for two adults and two children cost about \$S516 in March.

The Dubai city skyline at sunrise, with the iconic Burj Khalifa.



GoAheadQuoteMe



You use as little energy as necessary. You know, the Queen is very stingy with her energy.



SINGER CHAKA KHAN on perfecting her wave to the crowd in her New Year's Day role as grand marshal at the Rose Parade in Pasadena, California



Don't eat and drink too much. I know I will, but that's no excuse for you.



PAUL MCCARTNEY'S year-end tweet, with photos of his trimmer younger self



I've found public speaking difficult in the past, despite being an actor. And it was playing Ruth when I finally thought, 'Right, you've just gotta get on with this and embrace it, in fact, and don't be scared of it'.



FELICITY JONES on how portraying Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the movie, *On The Basis Of Sex*, has benefited her

Taiwanese heart-throb behind record-breaking tearjerker

Jasper Liu's *More Than Blue* is the highest-grossing Taiwanese film of the year

Yip Wai Yee
Entertainment Correspondent

Actor Jasper Liu is no fan of tear-jerker movies, even if he is the star of hit Taiwanese film *More Than Blue*.

"I don't usually like watching sad movies. I like to feel happy and be surrounded by positivity."

"I know it's very ironic that I acted in a movie whose (Chinese) title is 'a story sadder than sadness'," he tells *The Straits Times* in Mandarin at live music venue 2mm Talent Hub.

The 32-year-old Taiwanese actor explains that he signed up for *More Than Blue* when he realised that it was a lot more than just a sad story.

"I read the script and found a lot of hope in the story. It's very inspirational — it's about loving someone so much that you would do anything for that person," he says.

More Than Blue is the remake of the 2009 South Korean melodrama of the same name, starring Kwon Sang-woo and Lee Bo-young.

In the Taiwanese film, which is now showing in cinemas, Liu plays K, a terminally ill man who hopes to see the love of his life Cream (played by Ivy Chen) happily married before he dies.

Audiences have clearly found the film moving as it has been breaking box-office records in Taiwan since it premiered there in November. Besides having the biggest opening weekend for a domestic film, it is also the highest-grossing Taiwanese film of the year with more than NT\$200 million (S\$9 million) in ticket sales so far.

In Singapore, the film had the biggest opening weekend (\$166,968) for a Taiwanese film since horror movie *The Tag-Along* (\$165,469) in 2016. This is despite the fact that *More Than Blue* is showing only on eight screens while *The Tag-Along* opened on 25 screens.

Liu says: "I think audiences were touched by the story because they could relate to the characters."

"So many fans messaged me on social media their relationship stories and how the film has affected their perspective on love."

Many viewers also told him that they enjoyed the film so much that they have seen it multiple times — a luxury Liu cannot afford at the moment.



Jasper Liu (left) de-stresses from work by finding a quiet spot, closing his eyes and imagining plenty of light. He stars in *More Than Blue* with Ivy Chen (below). PHOTOS: MM2, STARHUB

"I have been so crazy busy and my schedule so packed that I haven't been able to catch the film again since the premiere."

"I have a small window in March when I can take a breather. As soon as I can, I'll pack my bags and run off into the mountains in Taiwan and just camp out there," he says.

The actor has been in hot demand in recent months, starring in back-to-back films as well as television dramas.

Besides *More Than Blue*, his Taiwanese television series *My Goddess*, in which he plays an over-worked music producer, is also showing on demand on StarHub.

He is prepping to shoot Netflix original series *Triad Princess* alongside Taiwanese actress Eugenie Liu.

He says: "I have long days of work and it gets exhausting. So what I do is, I find a quiet spot somewhere, even if it's on a busy set, close my eyes and just imagine plenty of light."



• *More Than Blue* is showing in cinemas. My Goddess is available on demand on Hub Drama First (StarHub TV Channel 860) and StarHub Go Select.

As long as I am bathed in that light, I will feel less stressed."

Another de-stressing manoeuvre he pulled off during a packed working schedule last year was to take a secret, impromptu trip to Singapore.

He was in the midst of prepping for a new TV drama in Hengdian, China, when he suddenly packed his bags and flew here for a few days.

"I didn't tell anyone where I was going — I just bought the plane

ticket and came here.

"I chose Singapore because I have some old friends here and I know it's such a safe place. I'm not sure why I worried so much about the safety aspect because I ended up holed up in my room memorising lines. Still, it was nice to get away and be alone for a while. I promise I will be back again for a proper holiday some day."

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Concert to mark 50th anniversary of Woodstock music festival

NEW YORK • It is rolling good times again. Fifty years after the Woodstock music festival became one of the watersheds of hippie counter-culture, an anniversary event will take place in August on the same field north of New York City.

The Bethel Woods Centre for the Arts has announced a three-day occasion of "music, culture and community" that will celebrate "the golden anniversary at the historic site of the 1969 Woodstock festival".

The non-profit group, which now owns the 15ha field that was the venue of the 1969 musical bash, said in a Facebook posting that the Aug 16 to 18 festival will be a "pan-generational event".

It will feature live performances from prominent and emerging artists across multiple genres and decades, as well as talks from leading futurists and tech experts.

The festival is a joint venture with concert promoter Live Nation. Further details, including ticket sales and names of performers, will be announced later.

The August 1969 festival, billed as "three days of peace and music", is regarded as one of the pivotal moments in music history and 1960s counter-culture.

Over three, sometimes-rainy days, more than 30 acts — including Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, The Who, The Band and Grateful Dead — performed around the clock to a 400,000-strong audience, most of whom watched for free and camped on-site in the mud.

The happenings were docu-



The Bethel Woods Centre for the Arts, which owns the 15ha field (above) that was the venue of the 1969 Woodstock festival, has announced three days of celebration of the music bash. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

mented in the 1970 film *Woodstock*, which won an Oscar.

Although it was known as Woodstock, the event actually took place in Bethel, about 110km south of the village of Woodstock in upstate New York. Bethel is 144km north of New York City.

"Fifty years ago, people gathered peacefully on our site inspired to change the world through music," Ms Darlene Fedun, chief executive of the Bethel Woods Centre, said in a statement announcing the 50th-anniversary celebration.

"We remain committed to preserving this rich history and spirit, and to educating and inspiring new generations to contribute positively to the world through

music, culture and community," she added.

The upcoming event is not affiliated with Mr Michael Lang, a promoter of the 1969 festival, who has also spoken of plans to organise a 50th-anniversary bash, but has yet to make any announcement.

Woodstock anniversary festivals were also held in 1994, 1998 and 1999.

Many of the 1969 Woodstock artists are now dead. Surviving musicians who are still performing into their 70s include Joan Baez, Roger Daltrey and Pete Townshend of The Who, and David Crosby, Neil Young, Graham Nash and Stephen Stills of Crosby, Stills, Nash And Young. REUTERS

தமிழ்மூலம்

Lost in translation?

Tamil Murasu provides error-free translation from English to Tamil

Proof reading available

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Comics

BABY BLUES



GARFIELD



Free to air

CHANNEL 5

AM
6.00 Holiday Special: BBC Proms: John Wilson – George & Ira Gershwin Rediscovered (Cul)
8.30 Holiday Special: British Summer Time – Carole King (V)
9.40 Holiday Special: Intimissimi On Ice (Cul) (Premiere)
11.30 Holiday Special: Films & Stars: End Of Year Special 2018 (V) (Premiere)
PM
12.30 Holiday Movie: Max (PG)
2.30 Holiday Movie: The Blind Side (PG)
5.00 Let's Celebrate 2019 (V)
6.30 Holiday Movie: Annie (PG) (Premiere)
9.00 News 5 (HD)
9.30 Holiday Movie: Hidden Figures (PG) (Premiere)
AM
12.00 Holiday Special: Films & Stars: End Of Year Special 2018 (V)
1.00 Holiday Movie: Family Of Lies (PG) (Premiere)
2.45 Holiday Special: Intimissimi On Ice (Cul)
4.45 Holiday Special: British Summer Time – Carole King (V)

CHANNEL 8

AM
6.00 What's In The Fridge? (HD) (V)
7.00 Kids In Charge (V)
7.30 Hello Singapore Highlights (HD) (News)
8.00 Heart To Heart (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 Morning Express (HD) (News)
9.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)
10.00 Are You Up For It? (V)
10.30 Night Market Life Aka Life (PG) (D)
PM
12.30 Food Moments (HD) (CC) (IE)
1.00 News 8 At One (HD) (News)
1.30 118 (PG) (CC) (D)
2.00 Train Your Brain (HD) (S)
2.30 Your Hand In Mine (HD) (CC) (D)
3.30 Love Thy Neighbour (PG) (CC) (D)
4.30 Taste Of Life (PG) (D)
5.30 118 Reunion (PG) (CC) (D)
6.30 Hello Singapore (HD) (News)
7.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)

8.00 Emergency! (CC) (V)
8.30 Tuesday Report – Ninety Years Young (CC) (IE)
9.00 Heart To Heart (PG) (CC) (D)
10.00 News Tonight (HD)
10.30 Stay Healthy Stay Happy 2017 (IE)
11.00 Princess Agents (PG) (D)
AM
12.00 The Princess Weiyong (PG) (D)
1.00 Wonderful World 13 (HD) (V)
2.00 Changing Fortunes (D)
4.00 A Place Called Home (PG) (D)

CHANNEL U

PM
3.00 Mysterious Tastes (IE)
4.00 Taste From Home (CC) (IE)
5.00 Cheongdamdong Scandal (PG) (CC) (D)
6.00 The Menu (PG) (CC) (D)
7.00 You Are The Only One (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 Fun With Singnese (CC) (IE) (Finale)
10.00 Black Knight (PG) (CC) (D)
11.00 News Tonight
11.30 Fun With Singnese (CC) (IE) (Finale)
AM
12.30 You Are The Only One (PG) (CC) (D)
2.30 Close

CNA

AM
6.00 Singapore Tonight
7.00 News Now
7.30 Vanishing Foods
8.00 News Now
8.30 Vanishing Foods
9.00 News Now
9.30 Vanishing Foods
10.02 Cram Course Asia
11.00 News Now
11.30 Vanishing Foods
PM
12.00 News Now
12.30 Vanishing Foods
1.02 Cram Course Asia
2.00 News Now
2.30 Vanishing Foods
3.00 News Now
3.30 Vanishing Foods
4.02 Cram Course Asia
5.00 News Now
5.30 Vanishing Foods
6.00 News Now

6.30 The Year Ahead 2019
7.02 Why It Matters 2 (CC)
8.00 Primetime Asia
8.30 The Year Ahead 2019 (CC)
9.02 Real Deal (CC)
10.00 Singapore Tonight
10.30 The Year Ahead 2019 (CC)
11.02 Why It Matters 2
AM
12.00 News Now
12.30 The Year Ahead 2019
1.02 Real Deal
2.00 News Now
2.30 First Look Encore
3.02 Cram Course Asia
4.00 News Now
4.30 First Look Encore
5.02 Real Deal
Programmes may be pre-empted by breaking news

VASANTHAM

AM
7.00 Thein Amuthu 2018 (V)
8.00 Ha Ha Ha Sirippu 2018 (V)
8.30 Super Samayal 3 (HD) (IE)
9.00 Motu Patlu (S)
9.30 Navarasa Kondattam 2 (V)
11.00 Illayaraja Live In Concert Singapore New Year Special (Part 2) (V)
PM
1.00 Tamil Silver Screen: Nadigaiyar Thilagam (PG) (Holiday Movie)
3.30 Vidumurai Vasantham 2 (V)
4.30 Pradhana Vizha 2018 (V)
7.30 Ms V Supreme 2019
8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)
9.00 Vaanga Kondaadalam (New Year Special)
10.00 Tamil Silver Screen: Chekka Chivantha Vaanam (PG13) (Holiday Movie)
AM
12.00 Tamil Seithi (Encore) (News)
12.30 Close

OKTO

AM
9.00 Bob The Builder Mega Machines (P)
10.10 Dora The Explorer Specials – Dora Dances To The Rescue (P)
11.00 Dora The Explorer (HD) (P)
11.30 Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood (HD) (P)
PM
12.00 Bugsville (P)

12.30 Teddies (HD) (IE)
1.00 Little Charmers (HD) (P)
1.30 Messy Goes To Okido (HD) (P)
2.00 Floogals (HD) (P)
2.30 Sesame Street (HD) (P)
3.00 Little Houdini (HD) (P)
3.30 Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood (HD) (P)
4.00 All Over The Workplace (S)
4.30 Sherazade: The Untold Stories (S)
5.00 Littlest Pet Shop (S)
5.30 Grizzly & The Lemmings (S)
6.00 The Lion Guard (S)
6.30 Don't Try This At Home (HD) (S)
7.00 Khumba (HD) (CC) (M)
8.45 OddBods (HD) (S)
9.00 AFF Suzuki Cup 2018 (HD) (Sports) (Encore)
11.00 American Ninja Warrior 6 (HD) (PG) (Sports)
AM
12.00 Close

SURIA

AM
10.00 RAI (IE)
10.30 Di Sebalik: Tombiruo Penunggu Rimba (PG) (M)
11.00 Anugerah Planet Muzik 2018 (V)
PM
1.30 Menantu Material (PG) (CC) (M)
3.30 Unplugged 2 (V)
4.00 Cucu Atuk (PG) (CC) (M)
6.00 Cicakman Siri Animasi (HD) (S)
6.30 Kelana Rasa (CC) (IE)
7.00 Teratai Kemboja (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Berita (HD) (News)
8.30 Kek Champion (CC) (Debut)
9.30 Rintihan Hati (PG) (CC) (D)
10.30 Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan 2 (HD) (PG) (CC) (M)
AM
1.00 Berita (HD) (News) (R)
1.30 Close

C: Children; CA: Current Affairs; CC: Closed Captions; Cul: Culture; D: Drama; IE: Info-Ed; M: Movies; P: Preschool; PG: Parental Guidance; R: Repeat; S: Schoolkids; SC: Sitcom; V: Variety

Programme schedules correct at time of printing. Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to www.starhub.com/tv or www.singtelv.com.sg

TheStarsSay

Aries (March 21 - April 19)

Try something new. Your energy is bursting out of you, so be sure to make the most of it.

Taurus (April 20 - May 20)

Do not worry about your dreams. Your subconscious is trying to set you on a new path.

Gemini (May 21 - June 20)

You are feeling weird about a situation. But do what you can to influence the outcome for the better.

Cancer (June 21 - July 22)

You are having a problem moving between your private life and social circles, but you can overcome it.

Leo (July 23 - Aug 22)

Your energy is pushing you in new directions. But you can be sure that you will like what you see.

Virgo (Aug 23 - Sept 22)

Your responsibilities are calling. You are not going to have much fun until your to-do list is clear.

Libra (Sept 23 - Oct 22)

Expect some good news. It is one of those days when you can tell that things are going your way.

Scorpio (Oct 23 - Nov 21)

Do not push things too hard. If a hot opportunity appears, make sure you understand it deeply.

Sagittarius (Nov 22 - Dec 21)

You believe in yourself more than usual. It is a great day for tackling big projects and surprising others.

Capricorn (Dec 22 - Jan 19)

Things seem extra-dark. But find a way to keep hope alive and things should start to get brighter.

Aquarius (Jan 20 - Feb 18)

You need to get together with like-minded people. It is a good time to join new groups.

Pisces (Feb 19 - March 20)

It is harder for you to get along with people in authority. Do not bother to bring up new ideas.

- Provided by Astrology.com (www.astrology.com)

Radio

KISS92

AM
6.00 Maddy, Jason & Arnold In The Morning
10.00 Carol Smith
PM
1.00 Charmaine Yee
4.00 Shan Wee
8.00 Josh's Goodnight Kiss

ONE FM 91.3

AM
6.00 ONE FM's #1 Breakfast Show With Glenn And The Flying Dutchman
10.00 Cheryl Miles
PM
4.00 Weekdays With ONE FM

MONEY FM 89.3

AM
6.00 The Breakfast Huddle With Elliott Danker, Yasmin Jonkers & Ryan Huang
10.00 Midday With Howie Lim
PM
2.00 Prime Time With Claressa Monteiro
4.00 The Curve With Michelle Martin & Bernard Lim

UFM100.3

AM
6.00 UFM100.3 Mornings With Wenhong, Limei & Xiaozhu
10.00 Lively Life With Kevin
PM
1.00 Tea With Yuling
4.00 Sing-a-long With Xinying & Weilong
8.00 Feel The Night With Chengyao

96.3 HAO FM

AM
6.00 Morning Drive Time With Jing Yun, De Ming And Jie Qi
10.00 Lunch Break With Anna
PM
1.00 Automation
4.00 Evening Drive Time With Li Yi And Guo Xian
8.00 Night Time With Wei Wen

Tides

SUN RISE/SET TIME: 7.07am/7.10pm
MOON RISE/SET TIME: 3.02am/3.22pm

TIDES TODAY: Singapore: 1.03am (1.3m), 7.16am (2.7m), 2.07pm (1.1m), 8.33pm (2.4m). Desaru: 12.31am (1.6m), 6.39am (2.6m), 1.18pm (1.3m), 8.13pm (2.5m). Port Dickson: 2.57am (2.3m), 10.06am (0.8m), 3.38pm (1.8m), 9.39pm (0.9m). Mersing: 5.46am (2.6m), 12.53pm (1.3m), 7.57pm (2.7m).

TIDES TOMORROW: Singapore: 2.16am (1.5m), 8.11am (2.7m), 3.11pm (0.9m), 9.54pm (2.5m). Desaru: 1.52am (1.8m), 7.26am (2.5m), 2.15pm (1.1m), 9.33pm (2.6m). Port Dickson: 4.08am (2.4m), 11.10am (0.7m), 4.43pm (1.9m), 10.51pm (0.7m). Mersing: 1.38am (2.1m), 6.25am (2.5m), 1.36pm (1.2m), 8.59pm (2.9m).

For updates and more details, call Meteorological Service Singapore, NEA, on 6542-7788 or go to www.nea.gov.sg

StarHub TV

HISTORY (CHANNEL 401)

AM
8.30 Pawn Stars 18/9.30 The Pickers 13
11.20 Forged In Fire: Knife Or Death
PM
12.15 Swamp People 8/1.10 The Pickers 13
2.05 Storage Wars: Texas 6
2.35 Forged In Fire: Knife Or Death
3.30 History Drama: Vikings 5
4.25 The Pickers 13
5.20 Monster Motor Challenge
6.15 The Pickers 10/7.10 Pawn Stars 19
8.05 The Pickers 13/9.55 Forged In Fire 3
10.50 Mountain Men 7
11.45 Swamp People 9
AM
12.40 Mountain Men 7

LIFETIME (CHANNEL 514)

AM
7.25 The Simone Biles Story: Courage To Soar/9.00 Flipping Vegas 3
10.00 Who Runs The World With Mongchin
10.50 The Pop Game
PM
3.25 Making A Model With Yolanda Hadid
7.05 This Time Next Year
9.00 Who Runs The World With Mongchin
10.00 This Time Next Year
AM
12.00 Who Runs The World With Mongchin

HBO (CHANNEL 601)

AM
7.35 Robin Hood/9.50 Inside Out
11.20 The Great Wall (NC16)
PM
1.05 The Fate Of The Furious (NC16)
3.15 Alvin And The Chipmunks
4.45 Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens/7.00 Kong: Skull Island (NC16)
9.00 Pacific Rim: Uprising (NC16)
10.50 Transformers: Revenge Of The Fallen
AM
1.15 Your Highness (M18)

CINEMAX (CHANNEL 611)

AM
7.45 Paycheck/9.45 The Core
PM
12.00 Inside Man/2.05 The Art Of War
4.00 Back To The Future
6.00 Johnny English/7.30 A Time To Kill
10.00 Shaun Of The Dead (M18)
11.40 Strike Back (M18)
AM
1.10 Mercury Rising/3.00 Kidnap (NC16)
4.35 Patriots Day (NC16)

HUB E CITY (CHANNEL 825)

AM
8.15 Hot Door Night 15 (HD)
9.15 Dowry (HD)
10.15 Perfect Dating 6 (HD)
11.45 James' Kitchen (HD)
PM
12.15 The Gentlemen Of Wolgyesu Tailor Shop (HD)
1.30 Maids (HD)

2.45 Hot Door Night 11
3.45 The Doctor (HD)
4.45 The Gentlemen Of Wolgyesu Tailor Shop (HD)
6.00 Dowry (HD)
7.00 Hot Door Night 15 (HD)
8.00 Viva La Romance (HD)
10.00 The King's Woman (HD)
11.00 Hot Door Night 15 (HD)
AM
12.00 Destiny By Love
1.00 Viva La Romance (HD)
3.00 The King's Woman (HD)
4.00 Hot Door Night 11
5.00 The Doctor (HD)

HUB SPORTS 1 (CHANNEL 201)

AM
9.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018
10.00 Figure Skating: ISU Grand Prix Skating Helsinki 2018 Women's Free Skating
PM
12.00 Figure Skating: ISU Grand Prix Skating Helsinki 2018 Ice Dance Free Dance
2.30 Motorsports: Mitsubishi Motors Desafio Inca Peru
3.00 FEI Equestrian World 2018
3.30 Tennis: ATP Champions Tour 2018
4.00 Extreme Sports: World Surf League 2018: Women's Hawaiian Pro Highlights
5.00 Mubadala World Tennis Championship 2018 Day 2 5th Place Match
7.00 Mubadala World Tennis Championship 2018 Day 2 Semi-finals 1
9.00 Mubadala World Tennis Championship 2018 Day 2 Semi-finals 2
11.00 Football: EFL Championship 2018 Matchday 26 Derby County Vs Middlesbrough
AM
1.00 FEI Equestrian World 2018
1.30 Spirit Of Yachting 2018: Rolex China Sea Race
2.00 Snooker: World Championship 2018 International Highlights Finals
3.30 Figure Skating: ISU Senior Grand Prix Finals 2018: Vancouver, Opening On Ice & Senior Men's Short Programme

HUB SPORTS 2 (CHANNEL 202)

AM
8.00 HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series 2018/19 Round 2 Cape Town Day 2 Match 45 Cup Finals
9.00 Wrestling: WWE Raw (PG13)
PM
12.00 Superfeet Sandman Triathlon 2018
12.30 National Basketball League Round 11 Adelaide 36ers Vs New Zealand Breakers
2.30 Football: EFL Championship 2018 Matchday 25 Bristol City Vs Rotherham United
4.30 Wrestling: WWE Experience (PG)
5.30 National Basketball League Round 11 Sydney Kings Vs Brisbane Bullets
7.30 Magazine: Omnisport: TV
8.00 Wrestling: WWE This Week (PG)
8.30 Football: The EFL Highlights 2018/19
9.00 National Basketball League Round 11 Cairns Taipans Vs Perth Wildcats
11.00 Football: EFL Championship 2018 Matchday 26 Nottingham Forest Vs Leeds United (Live)

Singtel TV

CARTOON NETWORK (CHANNEL 226)

AM
9.00 Grizzy And The Lemmings
9.30 The Tom And Jerry Show
10.00 We Bare Bears
10.30 Supernooobs
11.00 The Powerpuff Girls
PM
12.00 Teen Titans Go!
1.00 We Bare Bears
2.00 Ninjago: Masters Of Spinjitzu
2.30 The Powerpuff Girls
3.00 Running Man Animation
3.30 Craig Of The Creek
4.00 We Bare Bears
4.30 The Powerpuff Girls
5.00 Teen Titans Go!
5.30 Ben 10
6.00 Teen Titans Go! Vs The Powerpuff Girls
6.15 The Powerpuff Girls
6.30 Running Man Animation
7.00 The Tom And Jerry Show
7.30 Grizzy And The Lemmings
8.00 We Bare Bears
9.00 The Powerpuff Girls
10.00 Regular Show
10.30 Steven Universe
11.00 Clarence
11.30 Adventure Time
AM
12.00 Oggy & The Cockroaches

AXN (HD) (CHANNEL 304)

AM
7.40 America's Got Talent 13
9.20 American Ninja Warrior 7
10.15 Valor
11.10 Insidious: Chapter 3
PM
1.05 Fast & Furious
3.10 Charlie's Angels
5.10 Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle
7.15 America's Got Talent 13
9.05 The International (2009)
11.20 Vantage Point
AM
12.15 NCIS: Los Angeles 8
2.00 American Ninja Warrior 7
3.00 The Blacklist 5

WARNER TV (HD) (CHANNEL 306)

AM
7.45 Lethal Weapon 2
8.35 Deception
9.25 Friends 7
10.15 Rush Hour 3
11.55 Troy
PM
2.50 Pacific Rim
5.15 Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire
8.10 Breaking The Magician's Code
9.00 Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice
11.45 Jack The Giant Slayer
AM
12.20 Friends 7
12.45 Lethal Weapon 3
1.35 iZombie 3

2.25 Lethal Weapon 2
3.15 Deception

COMEDY CENTRAL ASIA (HD) (CHANNEL 324)

AM
6.00 At Midnight With Chris Hardwick 2
6.25 The Daily Show 24
6.50 Just For Laughs Gags 10
7.15 Instant Mom 3
8.05 Your Face Or Mine 4
8.25 Most Ridiculous
8.55 Billy On The Street 5
9.20 Takeshi's Castle 4
9.45 Just For Laughs Gags 14
10.15 The Moose 8
10.45 Almost Royals
11.15 Saturday Night Live 43
PM
12.05 The Daily Show 24
12.30 Jane Krakowski: Get Happy
1.15 Just For Laughs Gags 14
2.35 Just For Laughs Gags 14
3.00 Takeshi's Castle 4
3.25 The Moose 8
3.55 Almost Royals
4.20 Lip Sync Battle 4
5.10 Key & Peele 4
6.20 The Daily Show 24
6.45 Your Face Or Mine 4
7.10 Most Ridiculous
7.35 Billy On The Street 5
7.55 Takeshi's Castle 4
8.20 Just For Laughs Gags 14
8.45 Sir Patrick Stewart: A Knight Of Comedy
9.35 Goddamn Comedy Jam
10.20 Stand-up, Asia! 3
11.25 The Daily Show 24
11.55 Above Average Presents
AM
12.00 Funny As Hell 4
12.30 Saturday Night Live 43
1.15 Key & Peele 4
2.00 The Daily Show 24
2.30 Funny As Hell 4
3.00 Most Ridiculous
3.25 Your Face Or Mine 4
3.50 Billy On The Street 5
4.35 Takeshi's Castle 4
5.00 Just For Laughs Gags 14
5.25 Monty Python's Best Bits (Mostly)

JIA LE (HD) (CHANNEL 502)

AM
8.00 Entrepreneurial Age
9.00 Speed
10.00 100% Wife
PM
12.10 First Love
1.00 In The Name Of Love
2.00 100% Wife
4.10 Entrepreneurial Age
5.00 First Love
6.00 In The Name Of Love
7.00 100% Wife
9.10 First Love
10.00 Entrepreneurial Age
11.00 Speed
AM
12.00 Chronicle Of Love
1.00 Entrepreneurial Age

Andy Lau cancels remaining Hong Kong concerts

HONG KONG • Flu-stricken singer Andy Lau has cancelled the remaining four shows in his concert series at the Hong Kong Coliseum.

Three shows from last Friday to Sunday were earlier canned when a throat infection forced the 57-year-old to apologise to fans and end the performance after barely four songs on the 14th night of his My Love Andy Lau World Tour last Friday.

On Sunday, concert promoter Focus Entertainment announced on its Facebook page that Lau had been diagnosed with the flu and was under doctor's orders to rest until he was fully recovered.

"We express our deepest apologies to all the supporters and fans of Mr Lau," the promoter wrote.

Those with tickets to Lau's shows scheduled for last Friday to Thursday were advised to hold on to them as further arrangements would be announced shortly.

Fellow artist Sammi Cheng, who lost her voice during her concert in September 2016, posted a hand-

written note on Instagram in a show of support for Lau: "Wah Zai, stay calm and rest! We love you! Sammi".

Wah Zai is the name Lau is affectionately known by in Cantonese.

Fans also took to social media to express their support for the star. Facebook user Olivia G. Madeira wrote: "Although I won't be able to catch the Jan 3 concert, it doesn't matter, your health is more important. I will always support you!"

Another Facebook user Cecilia Wong wrote: "As long as (Lau) is safe and healthy, I don't mind at all if he cancels the concert. He should rest well and not worry about it."

The My Love Andy Lau World Tour Hong Kong 2018 was a 20-concert series originally slated to run from Dec 15 to Thursday.

Lau cancelled his plan to perform 20 concerts in Hong Kong in December 2017 after he suffered pelvic fractures when he fell off a horse during a commercial shoot in Thailand in January 2017.



Andy Lau had to stop his concert last Friday because of a flu. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/ ANDY LAU



PHOTO: WONG AH YOKE

First meal of 2019? Post it on Instagram

Share your first meal of the year with ST Food.

Here is how to do it:

1. Take a photo of your first meal.
 2. Post it on Instagram today.
 3. Follow, mention and tag @straitstimesfood. Use hashtags #firstmeal2019 and #straitstimesfood.
- Look out for photos of first meals by newsmakers and celebrities at str.sg/firstmeal2019

Taylor Swift and boyfriend smile for the cameras

NEW YORK • Was it a move to drum up publicity for the debut of Taylor Swift's concert film on Netflix?

This speculation surfaced after the superstar singer was spotted walking the streets of New York with boyfriend Joe Alwyn on Sunday, hours before the broadcast of the Reputation Stadium Tour documentary yesterday.

The famously private couple had previously kept their faces covered or not looked directly at the cameras whenever they were snapped by the paparazzi, noted Elle magazine.

Not this time though. The pair, who reportedly started dating in 2016, were holding hands and happily smiling.

Perhaps, it was the cheerful year-end holiday mood, with the duo also having a lunch date with actor Alwyn's brothers Thomas and Patrick.

Last month, Alwyn, 27, got a career backing from Swift, 29, when she turned up at an after-party following the premiere of his film - Mary, Queen Of Scots - in London, though they did not walk the red carpet together.

Their latest outing in New York comes after Us Weekly reported that Alwyn intended to propose to the singer "soon".

The Reputation film, which she described as a gift to her fans, was shot in Arlington, Texas, in October last year. It also features Camila Cabello and Charli XCX, who both opened for Swift on the lucrative 53-show tour.



Singer Taylor Swift and boyfriend Joe Alwyn were photographed walking the streets of New York on Sunday. PHOTO: TAYLOR SWIFT UPDATES / INSTAGRAM

Buzzing

Aquaman still rules box office

Aquaman continued to make a splash in its second weekend in North America, taking in US\$51.6 million (S\$70.4 million) to anchor the box office. In second spot was Mary Poppins Returns while Bumblebee took third spot.

Greatest Showman soundtrack breaks record

The Greatest Showman soundtrack has ousted Adele from the record books. It has now notched the No. 1 spot in the British album chart for the 24th non-consecutive week, one better than the mark set by Adele's 21 album.

Obama puts wife's book on favourites list

NEW YORK • Michelle Obama will have no complaints. Her best-selling book Becoming was listed among the picks of her husband Barack Obama who has posted some of the books, movies and music he found most inspiring or thought-provoking last year.

The wide-ranging list includes songs by artists as varied as Cardi B, Janelle Monae and Nancy Wilson, who died last month.

Becoming topped his list of books, which featured multiple works by women and authors of colour.

The former American president started sharing his reading lists and playlists during his White House tenure and has continued that tradition into retirement.

An avid reader with a deep appreciation of pop culture, he not only celebrated art during his presidency, but also took it into the White House.

In 2009, before Lin-Manuel Miranda was a household name, Mr Obama invited him to a White House poetry jam, where the composer performed an early version of the opening song from Broadway musical Hamilton.

A love of books has always been one of Mr Obama's defining fea-



Mr Barack Obama's top picks for 2018 include (from left above) his wife's book Becoming, the movie Black Panther and a song by Janelle Monae. PHOTOS: REUTERS, WALT DISNEY PICTURES, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



tures. Nearly every night in the White House, he would read for an hour or so, The New York Times' former chief book critic Michiko Kakutani reported.

Here are some of his 2018 favourites.

Books

- Becoming (Michelle Obama)
- An American Marriage (Tayari Jones)

Movies

- Annihilation
- Black Panther
- BlackKkKlansman
- If Beale Street Could Talk
- Shoplifters

Songs

- Every Time I Hear That Song (Brandi Carlile)
- I Like It (Cardi B featuring Bad Bunny and J Balvin)
- Make Me Feel (Janelle Monae)
- Mary Don't You Weep - Piano & A Microphone 1983 Version (Prince)
- The Great American Songbook (Nancy Wilson)

NYTIMES

THE STRAITS TIMES SINGAPOREAN OF THE YEAR 2018

PRESENTED BY **UBS**

The Straits Times Singaporean of the Year award, organised in partnership with UBS for the fourth year running, seeks to honour the positive impact made by Singaporeans and celebrate the triumph of the human spirit

Kenneth and Adeline Thong

The Thongs not only open their house to young people without a roof over their heads to live in for free, but they also recreate a home within a house for them. Both left their jobs to be present in the lives of young people.

FINALIST

Read about the other finalists at str.sg/soty2018 and tell us who should be the Singaporean of the Year 2018 by Jan 15, 6pm

Cast your vote now at str.sg/soty18vote

Terms and conditions apply

THE STRAITS TIMES



When you've lived in a place for 40 years, wouldn't you call it home?

Isn't it interesting that across our 10,000 employees here at McDonald's, there's not a single architect or engineer amongst us?

Yet we've somehow managed to build a home. And why not?

After all, a home is where you find familiarity, comfort and quality. A place where you can truly be yourself – with family, friends and the food you enjoy.

So how do we celebrate turning 40?

We figured we would start by thanking all of you for 40 great years. And by inviting all of you to come on in.

And who better to welcome you home than our crew – people from within your community who strive to serve you better every day, and many of whom have become your friends.

Of course, we're also progressively evolving our restaurants – with table service rolled out gradually. All to make you feel even more at home.

Finally, there's our menu. Which will be filled with exciting new treats while continuing to offer what you've already come to love.

As you can see, there's a lot to come home to. So come home soon.

Come home to McDonald's.
Celebrating 40 years in Singapore.





**This new year, come home
to the fries you love.**



B| HOME

34.7

THE HIGHEST DAILY TEMPERATURE IN DEGREE CELSIUS
IN DECEMBER 2018 IN SINGAPORE B2

A 200km walk to mark founding of Singapore

Veterans walking 200km almost non-stop to usher in 2019, celebrate Lion City’s milestone

Jolene Ang

Two men are ushering in the New Year in a novel manner.
Last Saturday night, Mr R. Subramaniam and Mr G. Suresh Kumar set out on a 200km walk, organised as Singapore marks its bicentennial this year. They have walked non-stop and taken breaks only for food and to go to the toilet.
The endeavour is clearly no walk in the park, though the route begins and ends at East Coast Park.
Mr Subramaniam and Mr Suresh are the final two of eight walkers who started the walk. Six dropped out along the way due to reasons such as fatigue and foot blisters.
Another 140 attempted just part of the distance, either on their own or as part of a team relay.

The Straits Times spoke to the two veteran walkers yesterday when they made a quick stop for breakfast. They had 40km more to go, and were aiming to finish the walk by 8pm yesterday.
Said Mr Subramaniam, 55: “You tell anyone you’re planning to walk 200km, they’ll tell you you’re crazy.”
“(But) being a Singaporean, the bicentennial year is significant. This is the first such long-distance walk to be organised in Singapore, so I’m thankful to be able to join.”
Mr Suresh, 46, is a Malaysian and has been friends with Mr Subramaniam for over 25 years. In preparation for this walk, they joined the Standard Chartered Singapore Marathon earlier last month, which they completed in about 5hr 40min.
Mr Subramaniam has represented Singapore in competitions



Veteran walkers R. Subramaniam and G. Suresh Kumar (with cap) on the last 40km of their 200km bicentennial walk yesterday. Eight walkers started the attempt last Saturday but six dropped out along the way. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

CONSTANT MOVEMENT

It’s also better for us to keep moving. When we sit down for a long time, the aches and cramps start to come.



MR R. SUBRAMANIAM, on not disrupting the momentum of the walk.

such as the World Masters Athletics Championship in Perth in 2016 and in Daegu, South Korea, the following year. He walks about 150km a week and said he “can walk faster than most can run”. On a regular day, he has no problems walking 5km in 30 minutes or less.
Though the two friends are no stranger to long distance race-walking – they took part in a 210km walk last March that ran over four days, starting from the Batu Caves in Kuala Lumpur to Maran, Pahang – the current effort is the first time they are going without designated rest or breaks to sleep.
Mr Subramaniam has four pairs of shoes and socks to change along

the way, and Mr Suresh has three. But they have not been able to change their foot gear since starting because of severe blisters.
“I’m scared to take off my shoes – I don’t want to see the mess,” said Mr Subramaniam, half in jest.
He added: “It’s also better for us to keep moving. When we sit down for a long time, the aches and cramps start to come.”
Mr Suresh said: “Though I’m from Malaysia, I’m very happy and honoured to be a part of Singapore’s bicentennial history.
“We haven’t slept since Saturday, so we may be ‘counting down early’ tonight.”
The walk was jointly organised by

the Geylang Serai Citizens’ Consultative Committee, Singapore Masters Athletics and Geylang Serai Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circle, and supported by the National Parks Board.
Marine Parade GRC MP Fatimah Lateef, who came up with the idea for the bicentennial walk, said: “We wanted to be inclusive – people living in private estates and HDB flats joined – and we also managed to attract quite a number of mature walkers. That is a good analogy for Singapore’s resilience over the years.”

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Umbrellas, cover-all scarves and water bottles were out in full force as visitors braved a hotter-than-usual December at the Merlion Park in Singapore. Last month's daily maximum temperature ranged between 32.5 deg C and 34 deg C. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

December saw warmer and drier end to the year

Weatherman forecasts moderate to heavy thundery showers for the first two weeks of 2019

Goh Yan Han

Singapore had a hotter-than-usual end to 2018, the weatherman has confirmed, in a note that backed up anecdotal accounts of people having to seek shelter from the elements last month.

The first three weeks of December saw thundery showers and intense thunderstorms that developed due to strong solar heating.

"In the last week of 2018, Singapore experienced drier and warmer conditions due to strong solar heating and low rainfall under the stable atmospheric conditions over our region, arising from a low-pressure system in the South China Sea that drew some rain clouds away from our region," the Meteorological Service Singapore (MSS) said.

The daily maximum temperature

last month ranged between 32.5 deg C and 34 deg C.

The highest daily maximum was 34.7 deg C, recorded on Dec 23 in the Newton area. The daily minimum temperature mainly ranged between 23 deg C and 24.5 deg C.

At the Changi climate station, the mean monthly temperature was 27.6 deg C. This is 1.2 deg C higher than the long-term average temperature of 26.4 deg C for December, slightly warmer than the same month for the previous two years.

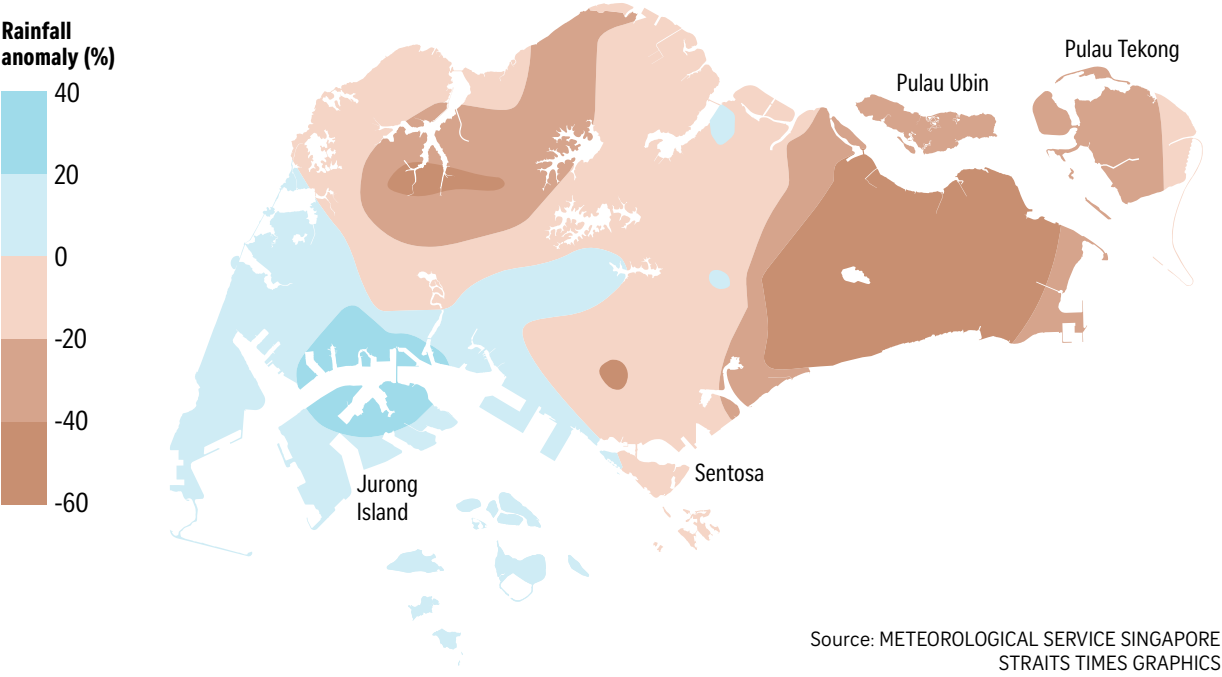
The mean monthly temperature in December was 27.7 deg C in 2015, 27.4 deg C in 2016 and 27 deg C in 2017.

At the same time, two-thirds of the island received below-normal rainfall last month (see map).

The lowest rainfall of 126.2mm (58 per cent below average) was recorded in the Pasir Ris area, while

Dry month

About two-thirds of the island received below-normal rainfall last month. The map shows the rainfall anomaly from Dec 1 to Dec 30.



Source: METEOROLOGICAL SERVICE SINGAPORE
STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

RAIN CLOUDS DRAWN AWAY

In the last week of 2018, Singapore experienced drier and warmer conditions due to strong solar heating and low rainfall under the stable atmospheric conditions over our region, arising from a low-pressure system in the South China Sea that drew some rain clouds away from our region.

THE METEOROLOGICAL SERVICE SINGAPORE

rainfall was highest around Jurong, where 357.4mm (33 per cent above average) was recorded.

Fortunately, the weatherman expects some respite from the heat in the form of short moderate to heavy thundery showers, mainly in the afternoon, on six to eight days in the first fortnight of this year.

The prevailing north-east monsoon in the region is expected to persist, with the high-pressure system over northern Asia strengthening over the next few days.

Low-level winds are forecast to blow mainly from the north-west in the first week of this month, before shifting to blow from the north-east towards the second week.

A tropical storm is forecast to move into the South China Sea, leading to a strengthening of north-westerly to northerly winds over Singapore and the surrounding

region in the first week of this month. "Coupled with slightly drier atmospheric conditions, warm and occasional windy conditions with passing showers can be expected on three to four days," the MSS said.

This warm and windy weather is likely to ease, however, with more showers expected towards the end of the first week.

The amount of rainfall for the first two weeks of January is expected to be close to normal levels for the month.

Daily temperatures in the first fortnight of this month are expected to range between 24 deg C and 33 deg C on most days.

But on days when there is little or no rainfall, warm conditions with maximum temperatures of around 34 deg C can be expected.

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Delays hit North-South MRT line

Christopher Tan
Senior Transport Correspondent

The North-South MRT line ended 2018 with a glitch that affected service during the morning peak yesterday, and persisted with delays well into the evening.

As early as 7.43am, commuters started posting on social media sites such as MRT Disruption Feed, Tata SMRT and Twitter about a track fault between Bishan and Ang Mo Kio stations.

"You don't deserve the six more cents," wrote one commuter, referring to the latest fare adjustment that kicked in last Saturday.

Another wrote: "Left home earlier but...wasted effort."

Similar posts continued past noon, when another commuter

posted to say train speed was still slow, adding that a train had remained at Ang Mo Kio station "for five minutes now".

Others said they had seen SMRT maintenance staff at the station.

Checks by The Straits Times found that southbound trains were still packed at 10.30am, a sign that the line may still be recovering from the early-morning glitch.

When ST checked again at 2pm, the situation had not improved.

Northbound trains were terminating at Yishun station, a sign that SMRT was sending more trains southward to clear the build-up.

At Ang Mo Kio station, trains remained at the platform for several minutes before moving off.

Once in motion, they crawled at around 5kmh to 10kmh towards Bishan, picking up speed only halfway through the journey.

At 4.30pm, commuters were still complaining of delays. At Ang Mo Kio and Bishan stations, commuters were informed of a "track fault" over the public announcement system. Asked about this, SMRT would not elaborate.

Eight hours after the incident surfaced, spokesman Margaret Teo said in a statement: "There are speed restrictions imposed for commuter safety from Ang Mo Kio to Bishan MRT stations (southbound only) due to track maintenance work earlier this morning."

At 6.07pm, SMRT said on Twitter that "due to track maintenance work, southbound trains from Yio Chu Kang to Bishan are travelling slower till end of service". It asked commuters to add 10 minutes of travel time to their journey.

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Love's labours lost for Cartier in trademark case

It fails in bid to stop MoneyMax from registering mark after arguing it was similar to its stylised 'love' trademark

K.C. Vijayan
Senior Law Correspondent

French jewellery giant Cartier's labour of love was lost on a trademark registrar in Singapore who made clear there cannot be a monopoly on using the word "love".

Registrar Mark Lim Fung Chian cleared MoneyMax Jewellery's bid to register its trademark "Love Gold" under the Trade Marks Act.

"A (love) bracelet may represent a metaphorical shackle of a person's loved one," he said in decision grounds last month, referring to Cartier's stylised "love" trademark registered earlier and stamped on its bracelets.

"The word 'love', however, should be free for traders to incorporate into their trademarks for jewellery," added Mr Lim, the principal assistant registrar of trademarks at the Intellectual Property Office of Singapore.

MoneyMax, a leading pawn-broking chain with shops across Sin-

gapore and Malaysia, had applied to register its "Love Gold" mark under the Act's Class 14 for jewellery and Class 35 for retail and other services relating to jewellery.

The application, made in 2017, was for use in a range of its jewellery products, including chains, earrings and bracelets as well as for retail services, such as marketing, online advertising and other goods.

Cartier International, part of leading global luxury goods company Richemont Group, relied on the earlier registration of its stylised "Love" mark in Class 14 goods to support its case. Items in which the mark is used include cufflinks, rings and brooches.

In Cartier's trademark-registered use of the word "love", the letter "O" is replaced with the device of a slotted screwhead and the letter "e" is in lower case, unlike the other letters in the word.

Cartier's "love" bracelet, first designed in 1969, is secured and can be removed only by using a gold "screwdriver" that is sold with the

bracelet. It was apparently referred to as "modern love handcuffs" to reflect attachment between two parties, noted Mr Lim.

Cartier, represented by lawyer Sukumar Karuppiyah, argued that MoneyMax's registration should be denied on the grounds of mark similarity, which MoneyMax's lawyer Aaron Thng disputed.

Mr Lim noted that the distinctiveness in Cartier's use of the word

COMMONLY USED

As noted by the court in Love & Co, 'love' is a word which is commonly used by jewellery traders, and should not be monopolised by any trader.



PRINCIPAL ASSISTANT REGISTRAR OF TRADEMARKS MARK LIM, in his grounds of decision.



MoneyMax has been cleared to register its "Love Gold" mark (left). Cartier's "love" bracelet (right) is secured by using a screwhead device. Principal assistant registrar Mark Lim noted the distinctiveness in Cartier's use of the word "love" was in the screwhead device for "o" and possibly the use of the small letter "e", and neither of these elements were present in MoneyMax's mark. PHOTOS: MONEYMAX, CARTIER

"love" was in the screwhead device for "o" and possibly the use of the small letter "e". He found that neither of these elements were present in the MoneyMax mark and held that they were not similar.

Mr Lim also rejected Cartier's claim that the application should be rejected as there was no distinctive character in MoneyMax's use of the word "love".

He said the two Chinese characters enclosed in a rectangular device with the words "love" and "gold", as well as the arrangement, made the mark distinctive as a whole.

Mr Lim noted that many other traders have registered a mark incorporating the word "love" for jewellery, including "Love Bridge", "PERFECT LOVE", and many more.

In dismissing Cartier's opposition with costs, the registrar referred to the "seminal decision" of Justice Chan Seng Onn in the past case of "Love & Co versus The Carat Club", underlining the judge's view that "no trader should

be permitted to monopolise the word 'love', whose use is ubiquitous in the jewellery trade".

Justice Chan, in the High Court case, had invalidated The Carat Club's registration of the plain word mark "love" for jewellery, precious stones and precious metals under Class 14 of the Trade Marks Act.

The judge held that the mark was "devoid of any distinctive character" under Section 7(1)(b) of the Act, adding that "the word 'love' is almost a breathing word in the jewellery trade".

He said that Justice Chan had then added "the almost ubiquitous use of the word 'love' inscribed on jewellery items and in advertisements in the jewellery industry, renders it difficult for members of the public to realise or expect that (Carat's) ordinary and rather simple 'love' mark is meant to distinguish the defendant's jewellery from another trader's".

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Armed forces chiefs visit troops on New Year's Eve duty



Left: Chief of Defence Force Melvyn Ong addressing the crew of the Republic of Singapore Navy's littoral mission vessel RSS Justice and members of the Accompanying Sea Security Team at Tuas Naval Base yesterday.

Top: An army security trooper on watch with a GPMG, or general-purpose machine gun.

Above: Personnel from the Republic of Singapore Air Force's 163 Squadron preparing the I-Hawk for operations. The unit was one of those visited by Chief of Air Force Mervyn Tan. PHOTOS: MINDEF

Lim Min Zhang

Chief of Defence Force Melvyn Ong and service chiefs visited troops on duty during New Year's Eve, and highlighted the need to stay vigilant over the festive period.

Lieutenant-General (LG) Ong visited some of the units deployed, such as the air force's 143 Squadron

operating the F-16 fighter jets and the Maritime Security Task Force, at Tuas Naval Base.

The task force deploys ships to patrol Singapore waters and maintains continuous watch through coastal sensors.

As part of the defence chief's yearly tradition, he also visited the 9th Battalion, Singapore Infantry Regiment (9SIR), which is trained

in the protection of installations, such as Changi Airport and Jurong Island.

In a Ministry of Defence (Mindef) Facebook post yesterday, LG Ong said: "Keep watch over Singapore during this festive period. Our families and loved ones can celebrate in peace because of your commitment and professionalism."

LG Ong was accompanied by

Chief of Army Goh Si Hou and Chief of Navy Lew Chuen Hong in his visits to the respective units.

Chief of Air Force, Major-General Mervyn Tan, visited the 163 Squadron, which operates the Improved-Hawk surface-to-air missile systems for ground-based air defence.

Major Benjamin Hui, 31, who is the executive officer on the littoral

mission vessel RSS Justice, said: "Even though today is New Year's Eve, this day is just as important as the rest of the other 364 days."

"As the nation ushers in the new year, we will continue to stay vigilant and work with other national security agencies to safeguard our security and sovereignty."

9SIR security trooper, Corporal Adil Nur Hakim Ariffin, 20, said: "Be-

ing on duty during the festive season is not something we would choose to do, as we cannot celebrate the occasion with our families."

"However, knowing that our 24/7 duty keeps them safe pushes me on to complete my mission," added the full-time national serviceman.

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New faces for Asean human rights commission

Adrian Lim
Political Correspondent

The Government has appointed Dr Shashi Jayakumar from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) as Singapore's representative to an Asean commission which promotes human rights.

His appointment will take effect from today, said the Foreign Affairs Ministry in a statement yesterday.

Dr Jayakumar, who is taking over from veteran diplomat Barry Desker, will be Singapore's fourth representative on the Asean Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), which was inaugurated in 2009.

The AICHR was responsible for developing the Asean Human Rights Declaration adopted by Asean leaders at their summit in Phnom Penh in 2012.

Law don Eugene Tan from the Singapore Management University (SMU) has been appointed as Singapore's alternate representative to the AICHR. He will represent Singapore in Dr Jayakumar's absence.

Dr Jayakumar currently heads the Centre of Excellence for National Security and is also the executive coordinator for Future Issues and Technology at RSIS, Nanyang Technological University.

He was a member of the Singapore administrative service from

2002 to 2017, and was a senior visiting research fellow at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy from 2011 to 2014.

Associate Professor Tan, a former Nominated Member of Parliament, teaches at the law, business and social sciences schools at SMU.

He is also an adjunct faculty member at the Singapore University of Technology and Design and an associate at the Centre for International Law at the National University of Singapore.

The previous Singapore representatives to the AICHR were former district judge Richard Magnus and veteran diplomat Chan Heng Chee.

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Dr Shashi Jayakumar is Singapore's fourth representative on the Asean Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights.

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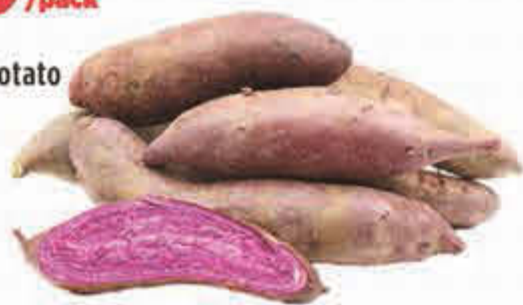
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New exhibition seeks to revisit Raffles' other facets

Objects the founder of modern Singapore collected while in the region will also be on display at ACM



A new exhibition on Sir Stamford Raffles at the Asian Civilisations Museum will seek to peel back the layers of who the Briton was, down to his callous side. PHOTO: NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON

Adrian Lim
Political Correspondent

To many, Sir Stamford Raffles is held in esteem as the founder of modern Singapore who initiated the setting up of a trading port here for the British East India company, following his arrival in 1819.

But a new exhibition opening next month at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) will seek to peel back the layers of who the Briton was, down to his callous side.

Mr Kennie Ting, the museum's director, said the majority of Singaporeans "know" Raffles as a mythical, one-dimensional "founder figure".

He was, however, not only "a scholar and avid collector of natural and cultural heritage, but also a ruthless statesman and colonial opportunist", said Mr Ting in a statement.

While Raffles is generally respected in Singapore, scholars have highlighted how he led a violent as-

sault in 1812 on Yogyakarta, then the biggest kingdom in Java, and humiliated its local rulers.

The exhibition, *Raffles In South-east Asia: Revisiting The Scholar And The Statesman*, will be held from Feb 1 to April 28.

Tickets cost \$12 for Singaporeans and permanent residents, and \$20 for foreigners.

It is co-curated with the British Museum, whose Raffles Collection items on display will include Javanese and Sumatran objects Raffles personally collected while in the region.

In total, about 240 objects will be displayed, comprising sculpture, architectural and natural history drawings, wayang (traditional theatre) puppets and masks, gamelan musical instruments, kris daggers, and royal regalia of Indonesian sultans, said the ACM statement.

Institutions and collectors from Britain, the Netherlands, Indonesia and Singapore are also lending their objects, which reflect the aspects of South-east Asian history that most intrigued Raffles and the British, as well as some aspects they missed or refused to acknowledge, ACM added.

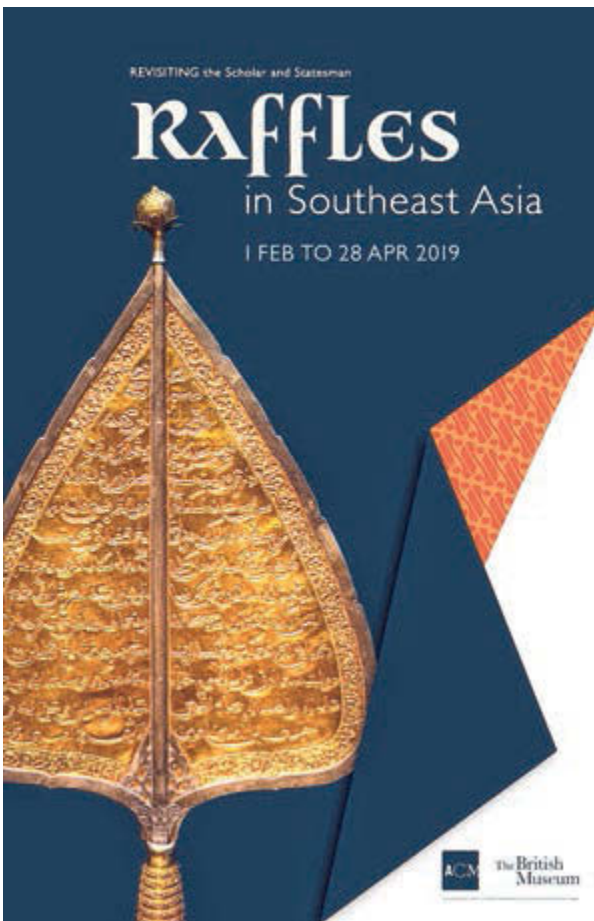
This will also be the first time pivotal objects pictured and discussed in Raffles' book, *The History Of Java*, are gathered from different parts of the world at one venue, it said.

Besides presenting Raffles "as a complex and multifaceted personality", the exhibition has another aim: To showcase the rich artistic and cultural heritage of Java and the Malay world, Mr Ting said.

The exhibition is part of the Singapore Bicentennial that marks the 200th anniversary of the Republic's modern history. Various activities have been planned for people to reflect on and learn more of Singapore's 700 years of rich history.

Mr Ting said of the exhibition: "We hope to inspire visitors to look beyond the conventional origin story of modern Singapore; to place this story against larger historical and geopolitical developments in the region."

Historian Peter Borschberg of the National University of Singapore said Raffles' time as a British official in Java – before he came to Singapore – formed his ideas on the peoples, languages, cultures, flora and fauna of South-east Asia.



The exhibition will be held from Feb 1 to April 28. Tickets cost \$12 for Singaporeans and permanent residents, and \$20 for foreigners. PHOTO: ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

"The exhibition, in other words, displays material evidence to help visitors delve more deeply into the varied interests of Raffles and his activities as a collector and learned observer of the region," Dr Borschberg added.

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The 120-year history of the Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery (above) was recorded in two books launched yesterday by Minister for Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing (centre in photo on far right). With him is Mr Chuang Shaw Boon, who headed the monastery's restoration works. ST PHOTOS: KUA CHEE SIONG



Two books launched to mark monastery's 120th year

Vanessa Liu

A collection of two volumes was launched yesterday to mark the 120th anniversary of Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery in Toa Payoh.

Minister for Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing, who was the guest of honour at yesterday's event, said that the monastery exemplified the Singapore spirit.

Referring to its architecture, which incorporates elements from different regions and dialect groups in China, he said: "It is in our DNA to continuously look for the best ideas and bring them back from the rest of the world to benefit Singapore-

ans, and in some other small ways, contribute to the world."

"We must always retain this spirit, to learn from the rest of the world, and bring in the best, just as how the architecture of this temple has illustrated to us," he added.

Mr Chan also toured the monastery grounds and chatted with the abbot, Venerable Wai Yim.

The collection was put together by an editorial committee of 27 writers – including authors, academics and experts on subjects such as Chinese history and architecture. It records the cultural and architectural history of the monastery.

The compendium, which also contains archival photos, newspaper clippings and old architectural

drawings, details the growth of the monastery and its historical significance in Singapore since it was founded in 1898 by Hokkien businessman Low Kim Pong.

Retired journalist Toh Lam Huat was the editor of the 452-page volume on cultural history while Dr Yeo Kang Shua, an associate professor at the Singapore University of Technology and Design, helmed the 340-page volume on architectural history.

The two volumes were published last month. The project, which cost about \$100,000, was sponsored by Thong Teck Sian Tong Lian Sin Sia, a religious charitable organisation.

Some of the 1,500 copies of the collection were gifted to those who

attended yesterday's launch, including former Cabinet minister Mah Bow Tan.

Dr Yeo said that he hoped that the topics in the publication would pique the interest of professionals from the relevant fields.

One of the oldest Buddhist monasteries in Singapore, Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery was gazetted as a national monument in 1980.

The last major restoration works for the monastery started in 1991 and were completed in 2001. The temple received the Architecture Heritage Award from the Urban Redevelopment Authority in 1999.

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Woman found dead at Geylang hotel; man held

A 34-year-old woman was found dead at the Golden Dragon Hotel in Geylang on Sunday night.

The police, who were alerted to the case at 10.45pm, said that the woman was found lying motionless in a hotel room at 61 Westerhout Road. She was pronounced dead by paramedics at the scene.

The Straits Times understands that she had marks on her neck and bruises on her arms.

A 29-year-old man was arrested in connection with the case within 14 hours of the police report being made.

The man will be charged with murder.

It is believed that the woman was an Indonesian work permit holder, while the man is a work permit holder from Bangladesh.

They knew each other, said the police.

Chinese evening daily Lianhe Wanbao, quoting an unnamed hotel employee, said the pair booked a room for three hours at first, then extended it to five hours. But, after 10 hours, no one had checked out.

Hotel staff, who went upstairs to check on the room, discovered the body, said the report.

Goh Yan Han

Gojek introduces dynamic pricing

Zhaki Abdullah

Indonesian start-up Gojek has introduced dynamic pricing – where prices increase or decrease based on demand – for its ride-hailing service here.

In an e-mail sent to users on Sunday, Gojek said that dynamic pricing would help shorten waiting times for both commuters and drivers.

While prices might be higher during high-demand periods, it assured users that rides would "remain competitively priced".

The firm – which launched a beta version of its app here in November – had earlier said that it would not introduce dynamic pricing during its first few weeks of operations here.

"Dynamic pricing has now been introduced as part of our continued beta phase," a Gojek spokesman confirmed.

"This is part of Gojek's ongoing programme to improve user experience in Singapore as we fine-tune our service to ensure it remains competitively priced, while meeting the needs of Singaporeans," she added.

In an interview last month, Mr Lim Kell Jay, the Singapore head for Gojek's main competitor Grab, had told news site Today that it did not intend to engage in a price war with Gojek.

Before Uber's departure, Grab had competed fiercely with the American firm by offering both passengers and drivers generous incentives to gain market share.

Regarding whether a price war between Grab and Gojek is likely, Singapore University of Social Sciences transport economist Walter Theseira said "it is clear that Gojek will use incentives to accumulate a reasonable market share".

Dynamic pricing is likely to attract more drivers to use the Gojek platform during peak hours, he added.

While upcoming regulations for point-to-point transportation services should include regulations on such pricing, these should not be restrictive, he said.

"Very restrictive rules on dynamic pricing just bring us back to the old days when you could not get a taxi during peak periods at all," said Associate Professor Theseira.

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Man throws himself onto oncoming car; police probing case

The police are investigating an incident where a man appeared to throw himself at an oncoming car along Woodlands Ring Road.

The police said yesterday that the incident, which took place last Thursday afternoon, has been classified as a case of a rash act.

Footage of the incident taken from the car's dashboard camera shows the vehicle travelling along a straight road.

A man can be seen in the distance walking on the road in the direction of the car, even though there is a pavement next to him.

As the car approaches, he suddenly turns and runs towards it, throwing himself against the windscreen before falling to the ground. The video later shows some passers-by checking on him.

The person who submitted the video to Facebook page Roads.sg, identified only as Ms Ang, wrote: "I would like to alert other fellow drivers who might meet similar scammers. This guy just ran towards my car and threw himself onto my car windscreen. I was scared stiff."

She added that the man later stood up and fled the scene when



Dash-board-camera footage of the incident in Woodlands Ring Road shows the man running towards the oncoming car and throwing himself against its windscreen before falling to the ground. PHOTO: SCREENGAB FROM FACEBOOK/ROADS.SG

she called the police.

Similar cases have occurred in the past.

In 2017, a drunken man was caught on video sprinting towards a stationary car in Pasir Ris Farmway 2, before throwing himself onto it.

In 2015, a driver lodged a police report after an elderly man hurled himself onto his car along Ang Mo Kio Avenue 6.

Timothy Goh

Man who hit former mum-in-law pleads guilty

He broke her nose after she refused to tell him whereabouts of his daughter, ex-wife

Shaffiq Alkhatib

Unhappy with his former mother-in-law for refusing to tell him the whereabouts of her daughter and granddaughter, a man punched the woman's face twice, causing her to suffer a broken nose.

The man, who ran an event management company, committed this offence in October 2015, about two months after he was released from prison.

He was sentenced to nine months' jail earlier that year for offences, including assaulting a public servant, but was released in August 2015.

As part of his remission order, he was not supposed to commit any more offences between Aug 26 and Nov 24, 2015.

With his latest conviction, he may spend an additional 55 days behind bars – the remainder of his earlier sentence.

The 32-year-old man pleaded guilty yesterday to 10 charges for offences that included causing grievous hurt, as well as assaulting a taxi driver and a police officer.

He cannot be named due to a

gag order to protect his daughter's identity.

The court heard that the man confronted his 56-year-old former mother-in-law in a MacPherson flat at around 9pm on Oct 1, 2015, asking her for the whereabouts of his daughter and former wife.

She refused to tell him anything and the pair got into a verbal dispute, which escalated into a scuffle.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Lim Wei Yang told District Judge Jasbendar Kaur that the woman slapped her former son-in-law after he told her that she was not fit to be a mother.

The scuffle continued and he punched the woman's face twice, causing her nose and mouth to bleed. The altercation ended when she fell and he left the flat.

The police were alerted and she was taken to Tan Tock Seng Hospital, where she was found to be suffering from injuries, including a nasal bone fracture. She was then given seven days of medical leave.

Separately, on June 17, 2017, at around 1am, the man boarded a taxi in an intoxicated state in Little India and alighted without paying the \$22 fare when he reached Saraca Terrace near Yio Chu Kang Road.

When cabby Chung Yuk Kee, 50, tried to stop him, he placed the older man in a headlock and slammed his face three times against a roadside metal railing.

Mr Chung managed to break free and called the police.

He was taken to Khoo Teck Puat Hospital and received stitches for a wound over his right eyebrow.

DPP Lim said that about four months later, on Oct 19, 2017, the attacker got into a quarrel with his fiancée at the void deck of a Serangoon North block of flats at around 6.40am, and the police were alerted. Officers arrested the man after he refused to calm down.

He also refused to enter a police vehicle and kicked Inspector Elrick Han Wang Ting, 30, in the face, causing mild swelling and pain.

The man is expected to be sentenced on Friday.

ashaffiq@sph.com.sg

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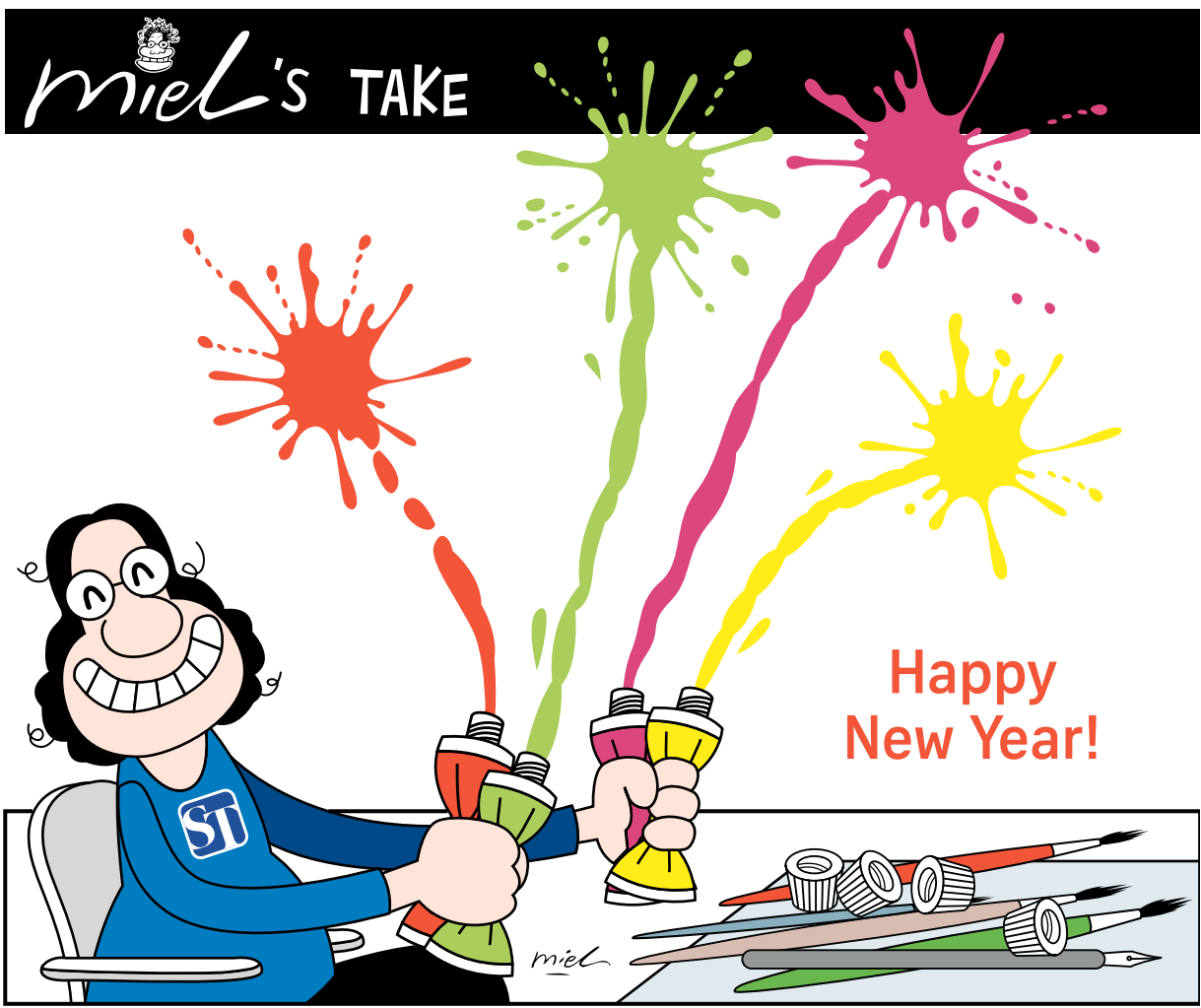
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FORUM



Enact law to stop online vigilantism

The recent altercation between a cyclist and lorry driver in Pasir Ris has garnered wide attention, and the matter is still under investigation (Lorry driver, cyclist arrested after Pasir Ris road altercation; Dec 25, 2018).

Road safety is always a cause for concern but equally worrying is how some people are increasingly taking matters into their own hands to “ensure justice” through online vigilantism.

The court of public opinion seems to have decided the fate of the cyclist and lorry driver even before investigations have concluded. Netizens were exposing information about the cyclist and even harassing him.

Such mob-justice behaviour should not be condoned as it is a sheer disregard of the rule of law. The police and judiciary are staffed with professionals trained to investigate and make proper

judgments of wrongdoings and we should let them do their job.

In fact, online vigilantism can go awry, as it did in this case. Netizens wrongly identified another person as the cyclist and he was harassed to the extent that a police report had to be made.

Sometimes, netizens who are quick to judge may not get the full picture and make premature and wrong conclusions, which is unfair to the parties involved. Perhaps it would be wise to have a law against such online practices, which is a form of harassment.

Sean Lim Wei Xin

Tap potential from reading to tackle dementia

Reading could be the key to reducing the concerning number of dementia sufferers in Singapore (Dementia helpline gets 40% increase in calls; Sept 5, 2018).

According to the report, one in 10 people aged 60 and above suffers from dementia in Singapore.

The potential from reading in combating dementia has yet to be fully realised, even though efforts have been made to utilise it as a preventive measure among seniors, such as the Senior’s Tech and Read programme held in Bedok Public Library.

Research supports the idea that mental stimulation, like from reading, can protect and even improve memory skills.

One particular study observed 300 elderly people’s memory and thinking abilities for six years, and discovered that those who reported they read were protected against

deterioration of memory and brain damage. Additionally, memory decline was reduced by 30 per cent among those who remained avid readers into old age, compared with engaging in other forms of mental activity.

A likely reason for this phenomenon is that when one reads, he naturally has to remember characters, plot, setting and other information, which keeps the mind cognitively stimulated.

I recommend implementing reading programmes for the elderly in senior activity centres and public libraries.

These would not only provide them with the opportunity to learn how to read as well as keep them informed, but could also well be our trump card in the fight against dementia.

Rachel Ho Yixin (Miss)

Everyone has part to play in tackling mynah issue

At last, the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority has found an appropriate measure to deal with the mynah menace (Major intervention to tackle mynah issue; Dec 29, 2018).

This mynah nuisance has become a daily occurrence at hawker centres, coffee shops and open-air eating places.

They descend on food that is left unattended, even momentarily. They also feed on leftovers and pose a health hazard as they have the potential to spread diseases through their droppings.

Food operators must ensure that leftovers are cleared quickly both at the tables and tray-return stations.

The rubbish bins at food centres should be tightly secured to prevent food spillage too.

Perhaps, the town councils could also consider installing nylon fishing nets between staircases at hawker centres.

This method has been found to be effective in preventing mynahs from entering some coffee shops and alfresco fast-food outlets.

At the same time, the National Parks Board and town councils should carry out tree pruning regularly to prevent roosting.

Every diner also has a part to play simply by returning his tray to the tray-return stations.

Andrew Seow Chwee Guan

Right of way is not absolute

In a recent report, experts spoke of a “right of way” when driving or riding on public roads (Experts weigh in on debate about ‘right of way’; Dec 29, 2018). This followed the altercation between a lorry driver and a cyclist caught on a dashcam video and which subsequently went viral (Lorry driver, cyclist arrested after Pasir Ris road altercation; Dec 25, 2018).

In reality, to prevent accidents or incidents on the road, a road user cannot insist on an absolute right of way. He must always practise road safety and do everything that is reasonably possible to avoid an unsafe act.

Had the lorry driver and cyclist done so, this accident could have easily been avoided.

Kanapathy Kanaayah



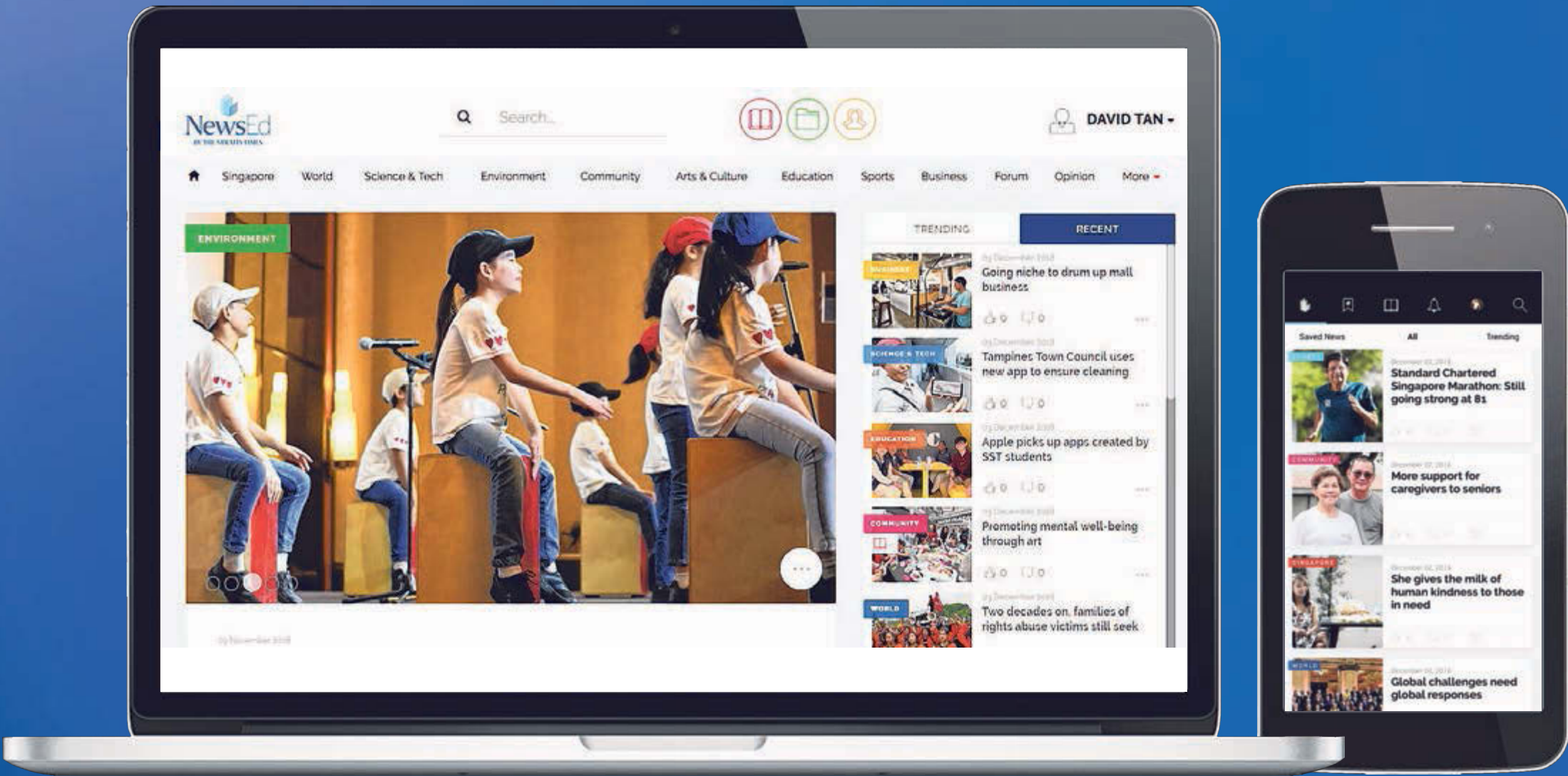
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Now that harsher punishment will be meted out to errant security officers on the job, it is important that security officers are hired only for tasks where they are most needed (Errant private security officers face stiffer penalties; Dec 24, 2018).

Often, security staff end up doing non-security tasks like watering the plants, collecting mail and receiving deliveries.

For example, the two scenarios mentioned by Mr Teo Kok Seah can easily be performed by non-security staff (Security staff can play a role in escalator safety; Dec 28, 2018).

In Japan, women in aprons are positioned at escalators and lifts at major shopping malls to assist shoppers in giving priority to parents with strollers and address unsafe behaviour.

I suspect security staff end up doing many unrelated services as part of their job because the actual security services take up less than 10 per cent of their time.

Perhaps this leads to service buyers thinking that the other 90 per cent of a security employee's time needs to be filled

with non-security work.

Clarifying the role and duties expected of security officers as well as identifying those that can be done by non-security staff are also important in the implementation of technology to reduce the dependence on manpower.

Many clients of security companies often cite the need for security staff to check that lights are switched off and doors are locked at the end of a work day.

These tasks can be carried out using switch timers and access control locks.

Other often-cited administrative services include photo identity verification, checking bags to ensure that there is no unauthorised removal of company assets and handling deliveries from courier companies.

These can all be performed by non-security staff.

Hence, there is a need to better educate the public and security services buyers on the role of security personnel so as to raise the level of service quality and professionalism of the security industry in Singapore.

Liu Fook Tim

We thank Dr Yik Keng Yeong and Mr Colin Ong Tau Shien for their letters (Can drones force closure of Changi Airport?; and Set up inter-ministry committee to study drone use, both Dec 27, 2018).

While we encourage the development of beneficial uses of drones, we also recognise the need to address the aviation safety, public safety and security

with non-security work.

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Liu Fook Thim

concerns arising from their unauthorised or errant use. Various government agencies have collaborated to develop security systems and implement enforcement measures against unauthorised or errant use of drones.

We will continue to monitor developments globally and collaborate with foreign counterparts and industry

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We thank Mr Vincent Ho Ching Mun for his feedback (Customers not told insurance premium notices were paperless too; Dec 25, 2018).

We agree with Mr Ho that any change from our usual notification methods should be communicated to a customer in advance.

From early 2018, we began issuing electronic policy statements in a move to step up efficiency and allow our customers to enjoy prompt access to their policy statements via e-mail and on our client portal.

As customers were adapting well to our initial batch of electronic statements, we began to convert our premium notices to electronic versions too.

We overlooked informing Mr Ho that premium notices would also be converted to electronic versions.

We sincerely apologise for this.

We assure him that the continuation of his insurance protection is important to Manulife, which is why we followed up with an SMS as a reminder when we noticed that his premium contribution was overdue.

His adviser is also ready to assist him whenever the need arises.

We have corresponded with Mr Ho on this issue and will be more proactive in updating our customers of any similar changes.

Simon See
Vice-president and Head of Client Services
Manulife (Singapore)

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